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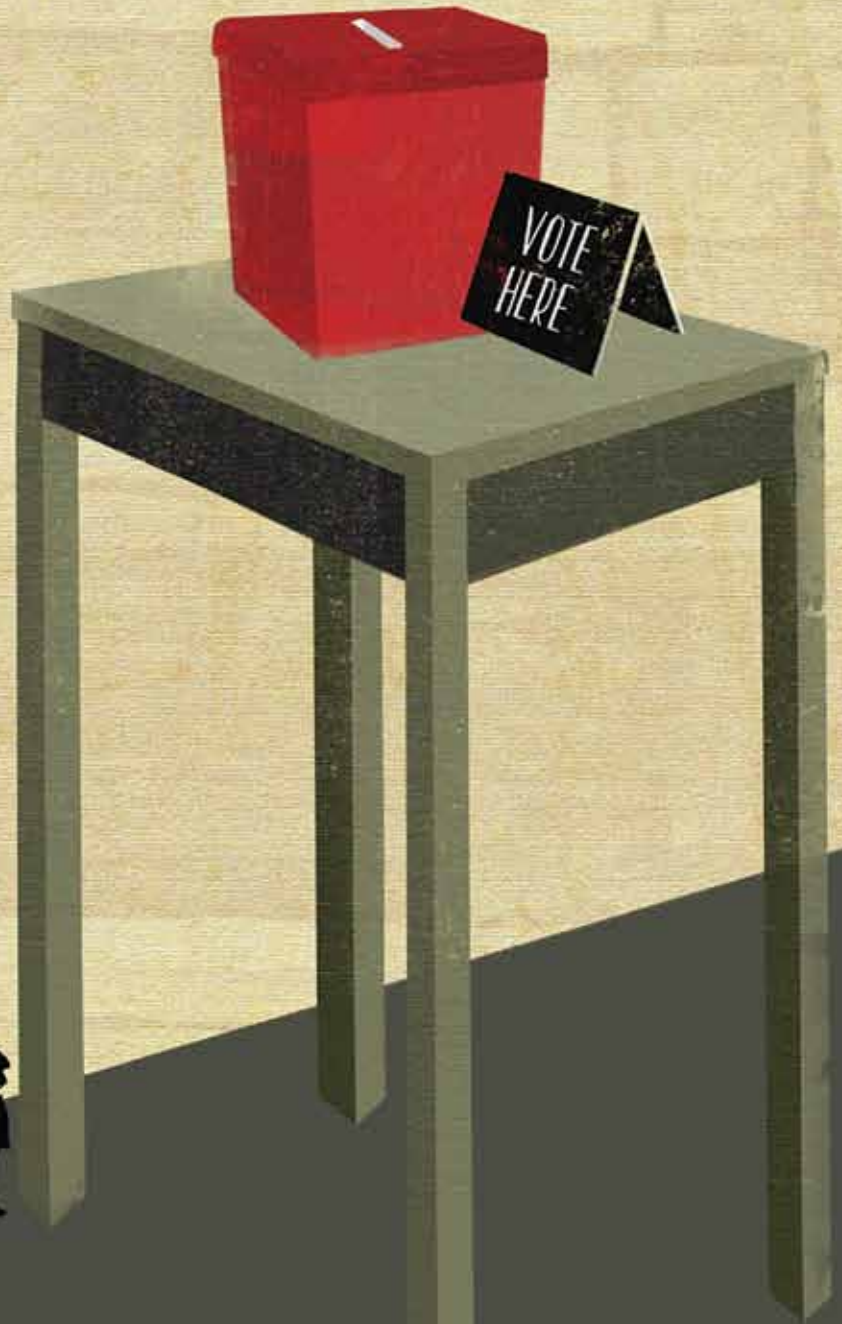
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Faith in Action for Social Justice

HOW TO SUPPRESS THE VOTE

Millions of Americans will line up to vote in the midterm elections. Many of them will be turned away by new laws that restrict voting rights.

The politics of voter suppression,
by Bob Smietana



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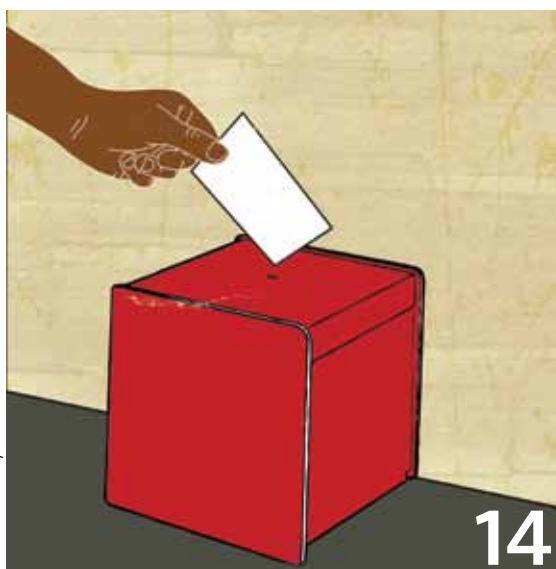


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contents

NOVEMBER 2014 Vol. 43 | No. 10

COVER

14 How to Suppress the Vote

Powerful people are trying to keep the “wrong” people from exercising their right to vote.

by Bob Smietana

FEATURES

18 Broken Cisterns

The roots of this summer’s carnage in Gaza can be found in the fatally flawed peace process.

by Jonathan Kuttub

22 One in the Lord

A look at three multiracial churches—and how they got that way.

by Maria-Pia Negro

26 Forty Shades of Green

Why trees should be part of Christian core curriculum.

by Seán McDonagh

CULTURE WATCH

40 TV’s take on the digital revolution

Reviews: *Pilgrimage through Loss*; *Chef*; Excerpt: *Forgive Us*

42 Eyes & Ears

by Danny Duncan Collum

43 On Film

by Gareth Higgins

COMMENTARY

8 Ferguson

9 Domestic violence

10 Church accountability

DEPARTMENTS

5 Letters

47 Poetry

48 Living the Word

by Min-Ah Cho

COLUMNS

7 Hearts & Minds

by Jim Wallis

12 Moving Mountains

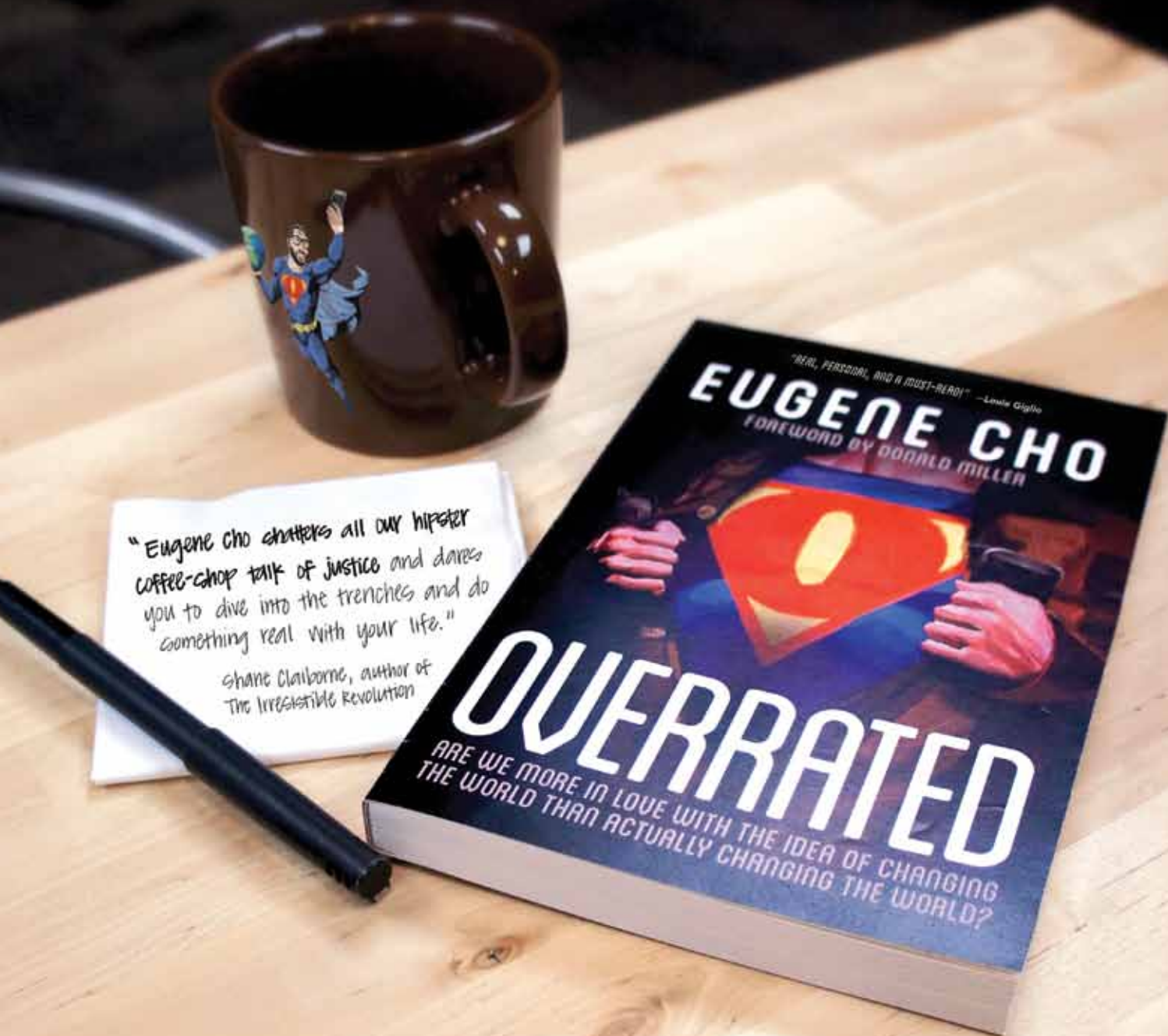
by Lisa Sharon Harper

30 Deep Economy

by Bill McKibben

50 H'rumphs

by Ed Spivey Jr.



"Eugene Cho shatters all our hipster coffee-shop talk of justice and dares you to dive into the trenches and do something real with your life."

Shane Claiborne, author of
The Irresistible Revolution

This book is my confession. It's painful and honest, but it's mine. And it's this: I am more in love with the idea of changing the world than actually changing the world...and that I, too, need to be changed in the process.

This isn't a message of guilt or shame. But it is a call, to both you and me, to be less infatuated with telling a good story and instead live the good story—a story of faith, hope, courage, and justice.



Eugene Cho is the founder and visionary of One Day's Wages, a grass-roots movement of people, stories, and actions to alleviate extreme global poverty. He is the founder and Senior Pastor of Quest Church, an urban, multi-cultural and multi-generational church in Seattle, Washington, where he lives with his family.

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AT CERTAIN KEY points in history, often sparked by dramatic and sometimes violent events, oppressed and marginalized people stand up and declare, We're fed up and we're not going to take it any more.

Those liberating acts of defiance—which are usually met with brutal attempts at suppression—are often just a moment of protest, an expression of the usually hidden anguish and rage that soon fades back into the daily resentments of injustice.

But sometimes those moments become a movement, one that ignites not only hope but real, lasting change.

Whether the events this summer in Ferguson, Mo., and in the Gaza Strip will be the latter will only be known in retrospect.

But in both places, the actions of supposedly powerless people issued a clear declaration: This shall not stand.

The one-sided massacre in Gaza—where almost 250 Palestinian civilians were killed for every Israeli noncombatant—was not a “victory” for anyone committed to a humane, just peace in the region, despite the self-serving declarations of extremists on both sides: the terrorists of Hamas, who fired thousands of rockets at civilian targets in Israel (injuring few but terrorizing many), and the government leaders of Israel, who



also attacked civilian targets, despite their not-very-credible claims otherwise (injuring and killing many innocents, including hundreds of children—actions being investigated as possible war crimes).

Making sense of such events requires that we place them in their historical context, and that is exactly what our authors Ryan Herring, Lisa Sharon Harper, and Jonathan Kuttub do in their respective articles on Ferguson and Israel-Palestine. And that can be the beginning of the effort to turn a moment into a movement. ■

Letters

ECONOMIC MYTHOLOGY

Julie Polter (“The Rich Get Richer,” August 2014) hits the nail right on the head, both in analysis of the issue and with her four policy suggestions. She correctly states that “Inequality is not the result of a law of physics ... therefore it can be changed.” Indeed, Thomas Piketty, in his recently published book on capitalism, writes that there is no invisible hand. Piketty, and now Polter, point out that economic inequality is the result of deliberate political action.

This myth, so very lucrative for a few, has not only harmed the country economically but is also correlated with poorer health and higher crime rates. It's time to return to the equal opportunity ideal of the American founders.

John E. Hill

Quincy, Massachusetts

BULLIED CHILDREN

Many thanks to Asra Q. Nomani for her excellent article “Get Them When They're Young!” in the August 2014 issue. As a pastor's wife, I taught young children of various ages in the Methodist churches where my husband served. As fulfilling as that was, I always cringed whenever I sat before each new class, for I sensed that those dear children would believe anything I told them.

Thanks for reminding us that “bad religion that bullies children must be countered

“We have learned much from Walter Wink.”

with good religion and good conscience.” Indeed, we must “coexist!”

Dottie Harrison

Frederick, Maryland

SHUNNED?

I was glad to see Bill Wylie-Kellermann's tribute to Walter Wink (“Struggling to Become Human,” August 2014), but with one qualification. Bill is right that Wink was “denied tenure,” but he was not “academically shunned.” Wink was highly regarded, participated fully in the Society of Biblical Literature, and was respected and taken seriously by colleagues. I counted him as a friend, but also as a valued scholarly colleague. We have learned much from him.

Walter Brueggemann

Cincinnati, Ohio

Bill Wylie-Kellermann responds:

Thanks to Walter for this affirmation. Wink's contribution was indeed enormous in my view and, in the end, well-received. After he was denied tenure, however, he could not find a job in the academy. I know it was a painful time for him.

In his autobiography *Just Jesus*, Wink writes, “Since that book [*The Bible in Human*

Transformation] had also incensed large numbers of other biblical scholars elsewhere, I found myself young, virtually blacklisted—and unemployed. One fellow scholar, when I introduced myself, said, ‘Oh yes, I read your book; I disagree with everything you say.’ Another simply turned his back on me. Such behaviors (and there were others) opened old wounds of rejection. I stopped going to scholarly meetings for five years until the reverberations of the storeroom rejection receded. But it took a lot of work.”

Corrections

In our August 2014 issue, we misidentified interviewer Onleilove Alston. She is the lead organizer in Brooklyn for Faith in New York, a member of the PICO National Network. In the September-October issue, we misstated the endowment of Union Theological Seminary as \$108.4; the actual endowment is \$108.4 million. We apologize for the errors.

“But what about...?” Write to letters@sojo.net or *Letters, Sojourners*, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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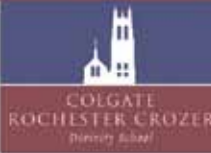
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BY JIM WALLIS

Finding Hope in South Africa



SOUTH AFRICA has meant a lot to Sojourners over the years. In the 1980s, I was invited to come to South Africa by key church leaders there, including Beyers Naudé, the first white minister defrocked by the Dutch Reformed Church for opposing apartheid; Desmond Tutu, the Anglican archbishop of Cape Town; theologian and preacher Alan Boesak; and Frank Chikane, a Pentecostal minister who came up through the ranks of the movement to lead the South African Council of Churches.

They became my “comrades,” as they say in South Africa, for six weeks that happened to fall during Lent—it was a powerful season for me of seeing and feeling the pain of that beloved country while looking for the hope that comes from peo-

ple thrust into this historic struggle with a heroic generation of South African leaders. This time, I came as an older man, blessed again—by making deep connections with a new generation who are finding their own agenda and mission for helping to build a new South Africa.

They are taking on the urgent mission of overcoming poverty and confronting the economic inequality that still plagues South Africa—with the gap between rich and poor even greater now than during the days of apartheid. We wrestled with those issues all along the tour and engaged in strategic conversations about how to turn political liberation into economic equity, opportunity, and justice. This “rainbow generation” is convinced that the churches should lead the way. My new relationships and ongoing conversations were once again a great encounter of hope for me in South Africa.

THE OTHER GREAT sign of hope was their agenda of overcoming gender violence, which has become so alarming in South Africa and across their continent. Having my wife and partner Joy Carroll on much of this tour became very helpful. She spoke on Women’s Day in Durban to an enthusiastic audience. Joy recounted the familiar phrase, “Give a man a fish, and he will eat for a day, but teach him to fish and he’ll eat for a lifetime.” Then she added, “But enable a woman to own the pond, and she will feed the whole community!”

Women in every audience were ready to lift up their voices for change. At every stop, we said that the fight against gender violence can only be served by a church that practices gender equality. I watched both younger and older women rise to that calling, and I saw men starting to embrace it as well. I found

these very hopeful signs.

Throughout the country, I told the story of the young prisoner I met in Sing Sing prison in upstate New York who told me about “the train” that begins in neighborhoods like his and ends up at prisons like Sing Sing. “You get on that train when you’re 9 or 10 years old, and you end up here. ... But I’ve been converted, and when I get out I am going to go back and stop that train!”

That story—from my dear friend and brother Rev. Darren Ferguson, who is now back home in New York City working to stop that train—spread all over South Africa, and young South Africans asked, “What are the trains in South Africa that we need to stop?” It was an inspiring conversation, and I eagerly await to see where a new generation will take it.

The scripture that often came to mind in South Africa was Hebrews 11, recounting our biblical heroes who acted again and again “by faith” and “of whom the world was not worthy.” It is so easy to add the names of so many South African heroes to that list.

But the text says these heroes of faith have not yet received what was promised to them, and that depends on us—how we now respond by faith. They become our “cloud of witnesses” and our cheerleaders sitting in the stands watching us “run the race that is set before us” on the dirt of the fields of struggle, continuing to act by faith. I could feel the investment that the older generation of South African leaders has in the younger ones—and watching that generational transition inspired my own faith again. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

I eagerly await to see where the “rainbow generation” will take South Africa.

ple who make costly commitments. Together we worked on a strategy between South African and U.S. church leaders to end apartheid.

Ten years later I returned to witness the victory of that hope in the miracle of Nelson Mandela’s inauguration as South Africa’s first black president, and later came back for an international reunion of anti-apartheid activists.

Those formative years in the South African movement for freedom helped give me my theology of hope—which I learned means believing in spite of the evidence and watching the evidence change.

This August, I returned to South Africa for a speaking and book tour, and I decided to bring my family to show them the country that had changed my life. I had come originally as a young man, blessed to



Water Rites

In July, international water rights activist Maude Barlow (left) joined a cross-border convoy from Canada to bring 50 five-gallon jugs of water to various Detroit locations, including the designated emergency water station at St. Peter's Episcopal Church. In March 2014, city officials, supervised by the unelected emergency manager Kevyn Orr, announced they would begin shutting off water services to 1,500 to 3,000 households every week. "In our traditions, water is a sacred gift," said St. Peter's pastor Bill Wylie-Kellermann. "But that understanding is legally embedded in the notion that water is part of the commonwealth, held in public trust, and protected as a human right."

By Ryan Herring

'Hands Up! Don't Shoot!'

Was the explosion in Ferguson a moment—or the beginning of a movement?

ON AUG. 9, Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was shot to death by Ferguson, Mo., police officer Darren Wilson. A collective groan was let out across social networks—people began the lament "Not again."

Just four days prior, John Crawford III, a 21-year-old black man, had been gunned down by police in a Walmart in suburban Dayton, Ohio, without warning, while shopping for a BB gun. A few weeks earlier, Eric Garner, an African-American man, was choked to death by a New York City police officer.

For young black men, each incident is a reminder of how easily our lives can be taken away by police aggression. For the people in Ferguson, however, over-policing is all too familiar. In a city where 67 percent of the residents are black, there are only three black police officers on a force of 53.

A 2013 report from the Missouri attorney general's office revealed just how bad

relations are between officers and black citizens. Out of the 5,384 traffic stops made last year by the Ferguson Police Department, 86 percent of them targeted black drivers. Black drivers were searched and arrested at nearly twice the rate of white drivers, although contraband was found at a rate 13 percent less than that of white drivers.

The shooting death of Michael Brown was the tipping point. The gathering anger and frustration bubbling on the streets of Ferguson from an abusive and militarized police force finally erupted.

What followed was astonishing. A generation often criticized for its supposed apathy toward social issues organized and protested while being tear-gassed and shot at with rubber bullets. Peaceful demonstrators took to the streets each night to demand the arrest of Darren Wilson and were met with an aggressive response by law enforcement. Police used dogs, tear gas, and stun grenades to disperse the crowds exercising

their right to assemble—events eerily similar to ones decades ago during the civil rights movement.

I visited Ferguson two weeks after Brown's murder. Lauren Allen, a 24-year-old doctoral student at Howard University, organized a bus trip from D.C. with 40 young people. We noticed the heavy police presence as soon as we stepped off the bus. By that time the National Guard had been called off and fewer protesters were in the streets at night, but the atmosphere was tense.

We met with St. Louis Alderman Antonio French, whose tweets and Vine videos had helped thrust Ferguson into the national spotlight. French began a voter registration campaign, with the hashtag #HealSTL, with the goal of ensuring that Ferguson's civic institutions reflect the city's racial makeup. (Ferguson's mayor is white, as are five of the six members of the city council and six of the seven members of the school board.) We canvassed neighborhoods

Our Mission

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as part of the voter registration campaign, just as generations before us had done.

As a child I was taught in school a rather romanticized version of the civil rights movement. Perhaps in my lifetime, I thought, Martin Luther King's dream would become a reality. As I grew older, I realized that King's dream—and the dream of my parents and their parents—was a dream long deferred.

What happens to a dream deferred, as Langston Hughes asked in his poem "Harlem"? Does a black unemployment rate more than double that of white Americans cause this dream to sag "like a heavy load?" Does the wipeout of economic gains made by the black middle class over the last 30 years cause it to "crust and sugar over—like a syrupy sweet?" Does the grotesque

underfunding of inner-city schools cause this dream to "stink like rotten meat?" Does the killing of a black man every 28 hours by a police officer, security guard, or self-appointed vigilante cause this dream to "dry up like a raisin in the sun" or like the body of Michael Brown left to bake in the sweltering heat for nearly four hours after he was executed? Or does it explode?

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon wrote, "Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it." For my generation, our mission is clear. ■

Ryan Herring, a former *Sojourners* intern, is founder and editor-in-chief of *The Ghetto Monk*.

By Catherine Woodiwiss

'It Couldn't Happen Among Christians!'

Even after the Ray Rice video, churches are in denial about sexual violence.

WHEN IT COMES to speaking out on sexual violence, the first barrier for pastors is awareness of the problem, according to a LifeWay poll, "Broken Silence." Commissioned by *Sojourners* and IMA World Health, the poll—released in June—surveyed Protestant pastors across the United States on their views on sexual and domestic violence. That church leaders don't often discuss sexual violence is not surprising; for perhaps the first time in the United States, the poll puts numbers to just how few actually do—and illuminates some reasons for the silence.

The lack of awareness of sexual violence is a multipronged problem. According to the poll, 74 percent of surveyed pastors underestimate the level of sexual violence experienced by members of their congregations. In part, this gap reflects a failure to understand the tragic ubiquity of sexual violence—1-in-3 women in the United States, and 1-in-4 men, will experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime. In a country in which 80 percent affiliate with religion, statistics strongly indicate that this issue is as pervasive within congregations as without.

Another problem, however, is around the willingness to believe it is happening. Of the pastors who talk about sexual violence, 72 percent do so because they believe

it happens in their local community—but only 25 percent acknowledged that their own congregants may have experienced it.

"It couldn't happen among Christians" is, sadly, a very common refrain among faith institutions. Reported instances of sexual abuse this year at Christian colleges, from Patrick Henry to Pensacola, indicate the deep costs of this refusal to ask whether sexual violence could happen "within the flock."

What explains this reluctance to believe the statistics? One cause is gendered views of authority and entrenched attitudes around sex and marriage. For those with theologies that enthrone the man as the head of the household and declare a woman's purity to be of utmost concern, conversations about healthy, consensual sex are often either distorted or skipped entirely. And when divorce is held as the highest sin for a married couple, a large majority of pastors (62 percent, according to the poll), when confronted with abuse in a marriage, opt to provide couples with counseling and encouragement to stay faithful to their marriage vows—guidance that, without providing avenues for outside help and safety, can prove horribly damaging to the abused.

The good news is that 81 percent of pastors say that they would take appropriate action to reduce sexual violence if they

From the Archives

November 1993

Economics as if Values Mattered

DESPITE appearances, economics is in essence a very personal and fundamentally moral discipline. It is nothing short of the web of our material relationships with one another and with the natural environment. Economic relationships have personalities and personal histories. Inescapably, these relationships physically manifest our social and spiritual values.

Our language expresses this duality. "Values" are both moral principles and economic measures. "Equity" is defined both as a financial interest in property and as fairness or justice. The root of "property" is also the root of "propriety." But perception and practice often reflect a division between them.

Many of the economic problems confronting us can be understood as the result of neglected or broken relationships. Americans ... have a tendency to polarize public and private interests and, in our case, to mythologize the private sector and ignore the community as a genuine economic actor.

If it will, the church can play a critical role in healing these divisions. It has a unique contribution to make: philosophically, by drawing on its theology of creation, its understanding of the individual in community, and its preferential option for the poor; practically, because it is the largest and most widespread non-governmental institution and one of the few stable institutions in low-income communities. ■

Chuck Matthei was president of Equity Trust when this article appeared.



were trained and had adequate resources. This points to significant potential within church leadership for training and education. And resources are available—several Protestant denominations subscribe to "Safe Sanctuary" policies, and groups such as the Faith Trust Institute, Safe Havens, and the Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence have been remarkably successful in providing avenues for conversation, counseling, and healing among congregations.

While only 56 percent of surveyed pastors are familiar with local resources and facilities to address violence, they largely indicate a willingness to learn more. For many pastors, this would be enough to significantly improve their ability to respond well.

Yet speaking out ultimately requires the willingness to take action. The poll illustrates this tension around heavily tabooed issues in the church—if awareness is the main barrier to breaking the silence on sexual violence, perhaps the deepest challenge is the willingness to listen. The wave of sex

abuse reports from Christian colleges—and the historical obstacles to removing from leadership a pastor with a history of excusing or condoning sexual violence—indicates the difficulty of facing a hard truth that upends what Christians want to believe about their institutions. While 81 percent of pastors say they will speak out with training, a full 19 percent disagree or say they "don't know."

For those to whom acknowledging sexual violence in their house is profoundly destabilizing, the greatest challenge is humility. Research shows that the advice of the first person a victim tells will in large measure determine their next steps. Bringing the pain of sexual violence into the light for healing and forgiveness requires those who have encountered it to tell their stories—and the rest of us to listen, with humility, repentance, and support. ■

Catherine Woodiwiss is associate web editor at Sojourners.

By Beau Underwood

The Self-Destruction of Mark Driscoll

Churches—like everyone else—need accountability.

OUTSIDE OF BUSINESS circles, accountability is rarely a popular conversation topic. Its implications of deference to authority and limitations on personal freedom are at odds with Western cultural trends. But the controversies that have dogged evangelical pastor Mark Driscoll demonstrate the need for Christians and churches to think more seriously about how authority is understood, exercised, and appropriately checked.

Driscoll, a best-selling author and pastor of Mars Hill Church in Washington state, is known for preaching a "muscular" brand of Christianity and a personal arrogance that fits the part. His views and provocative statements on gender roles, homosexuality, and a variety of other topics have repeatedly sparked debate within evangelicalism, but recent revelations that he pseudonymously posted offensive comments on an online church message board have justifiably brought condemnation from many.

Yet Driscoll's theology is not the only thing landing him in hot water. A group of

more than 20 former Mars Hill pastors have filed a formal grievance with the church based on Driscoll's leadership style and actions that have been labeled intimidating, controlling, and abusive. Revelations that church funds were spent to buy copies of his book in the hopes of making it a *New York Times* bestseller and allegations of plagiarism resulted in a formal apology and his publisher pulling books from store shelves. This fall, Driscoll took a multiple-week leave of absence and sought counseling while the church reviewed the complaints against him.

Watching this train wreck has been a source of entertainment and even glee for many Christians; Driscoll is easy to dislike and seems to be getting what's due to him. But the temptation to self-righteousness and pride afflicts us all. What makes the Driscoll dilemma so captivating is the prominence of his pulpit, the unapologetic nature of his "headship" theology that privileges masculinity over discipleship, and his

lack of awareness of the inappropriateness of his behavior.

Yet placing the blame entirely at Driscoll's feet would be a mistake. While he styles himself a modern-day prophet, he is far more the product of culture and institutional failure than he likely realizes. There is a major systemic reason for this failure: Evangelicalism has long been distrustful of centralized authority and institutions. Instead, it focuses on individual personalities and rallies around charismatic leaders, who often need and seek out acclamation. Driscoll clearly enjoyed the attention his provocations brought him, and many Christians inflated his ego by buying his books, retweeting his opinions, and extolling his virtues.

While some denounced his worst behaviors, nobody with influence or power over Driscoll seemed willing or able to exert authority over him. Now, as Driscoll creatively self-destructs, the religious marketplace will render its judgment—Driscoll appears to have been finally marginalized within the evangelical world, and people are leaving Mars Hill.

Driscoll is far from the first pastor to make an idol out of his own ego. But the lesson here is an old one: faithful discipleship requires humility and obedience. Leadership in ministry is fundamentally about making sacrifices in order to serve others (Mark 10:43-45). Driscoll mistook his personal views for the gospel. He pointed toward a God created in his own image instead of seeing the image of God in everything created.

Accountability is a necessary emphasis in Christian formation and the building of Christian community. By allowing others to lovingly correct our failures in judgment and misguided actions, we protect ourselves from straying from discipleship's narrow road.

Driscoll deserves the condemnation he's receiving, but better accountability mechanisms could have saved him and so many others a lot of pain. He follows in a long line of prominent evangelicals who have fallen from grace; these acts of public self-destruction inflict great costs to the body of Christ that could be avoided if accountability within the church received the attention it deserves. ■

Beau Underwood is senior director of advocacy and communications at Sojourners.



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The Valley of Lament

WE HAVE AMPLE reason to weep of late: war in Gaza, crisis in Syria, ISIS in Iraq, the slaying of five unarmed black men in one month at the hands of U.S. police officers, and the demise of congressional immigration reform.

Scripture calls us to cross over into the valley of lament at times such as these. Yet most of us are more comfortable on the plateau of rage or the plain of apathy.

I once led a training on lament and racial reconciliation. Twenty college students sat in the living room of a ministry house as I recited a lament from Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet”: “O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people!” (9:1).

I spoke of the impact of racial injustice in our nation and on our campuses. I recounted slave narratives to the students—stories that had brought me to tears privately. Yet, when the last word was read, the



Reuters

a diminishing of, or a blindness to, lament and the necessary confession that is inherent within it.”

Years ago I told sad stories, trying to jerk tears from the faces of young people who knew very little about the institution of U.S. slavery and had no sense of our collective American and Christian responsibility for and benefit from it. To the students, they were just sad stories. I get it now. Distant historical sin is internalized intellectually, and it’s a long jump for most to make to soften hearts for lament and repentance. Thus, hot words fell on stone hearts in that living room.

Flash forward: One week after returning from Ferguson, Mo., where I spent a week traversing the city organizing evangelical pastors to engage the struggle by day and marching with protesters by night—the tears came.

A police car whizzed by with its siren on blast and lights blaring. Intractable Ferguson police and flanks of white men in uniform pointed guns at children, mothers, and fathers who marched simply to say that what happened to their son, friend, nephew was wrong. Images of Michael Brown lying dead in the street for four hours, blood streaming from his head mixed with tar under his face, and the sound of his mother’s blood-curdling scream as the police prevented her from placing

a white sheet over her son’s dead body—these moments haunted me.

Memories of the chorus of faith leaders who confessed their culpability in the killing of Michael Brown came to mind. Each said, “Forgive us.” Bernice King’s confession was the most profound. The daughter of Martin Luther King Jr., repented: “Since my father’s assassination, we have been asleep.” I wept. Oh, God, forgive us. You called us to be shalom-doers in our land, yet we have only sought our own prosperity. Our ancestors marched, bled, and died for the vote, but we have squandered it. These are the reasons five young lives—Michael Brown, Ezell Ford, Eric Garner, John Crawford, and Dante Parker—are gone.

Rev. Traci Blackmon, pastor of Christ the King UCC in Florissant, a town neighboring Ferguson, recently reported how local women took to the streets in the community where Michael Brown lived. “To drum beats that called to us from the Motherland,” Blackmon wrote, “we sang, we prayed, we cried, we screamed, we cussed, we held on to one another ... we began the journey back ... with the residents leading the way.”

This is the valley of lament. Oh, God, help us all cross over. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper is senior director of mobilizing at Sojourners.



At right, demonstrators in Ferguson, Mo.

Many of us are more comfortable on the plateau of rage or the plain of apathy.

students sat silent with glazed eyes staring back at me.

I didn’t get it. The whippings of human beings, the children separated from their mothers and fathers, the hands, feet, and lives lost in the midst of America’s darkest hours—these things happened. How could we not lament?

My new book, *Forgive Us: Confessions of a Compromised Faith*, co-authored with Soong-Chan Rah, Mae Cannon, and Troy Jackson, opens with teachings on the value, purpose, and practice of lament and confession (see excerpt, page 46). “The church tends to view itself as the world’s problem solver,” we suggest. “This belief ... results in

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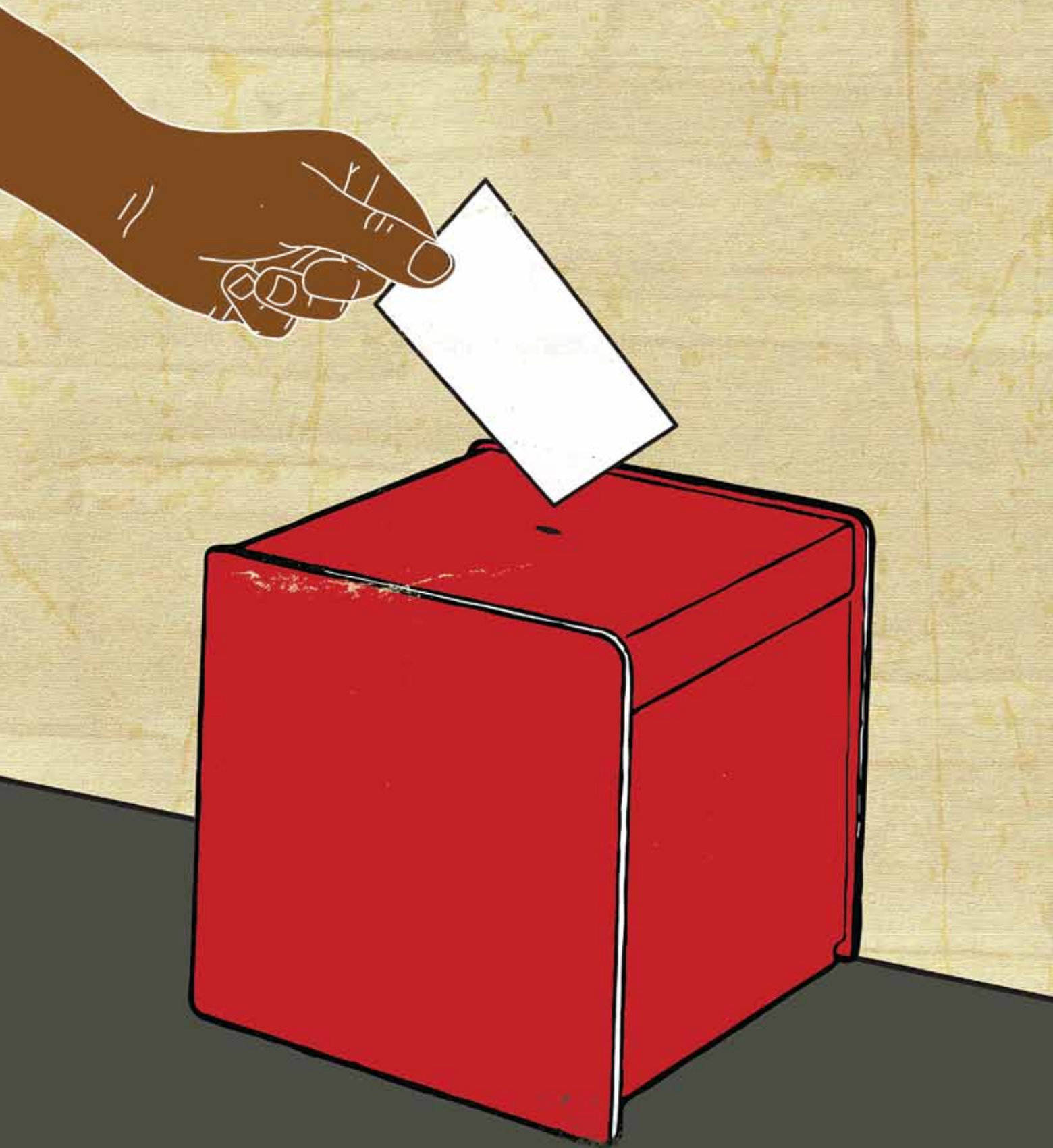


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HOW to SUPPRESS

THE
VOTE

**Why powerful people are working to curtail voting rights
in America (for certain people, that is).**

IN THIS YEAR'S midterm elections, hundreds of thousands of Americans will have a much more difficult time casting their ballots than they did two years ago. And it won't be because of rain, or early winter snows, or other acts of God.

It will be because powerful people don't want them to vote.

Why? They stand to gain politically if the “wrong” people can be kept away from the polls. It's the opposite of a “get out the vote” campaign—“keep out the vote” describes it better.

The tradition of keeping particular sectors of the population from taking part in the franchise goes back to the founding fathers. John Adams, for instance, believed that only rich, successful, smart people should vote—and only people of a certain race and gender, of course.

“Such is the frailty of the human heart,” Adams wrote in May 1776, “that very few men who have no property have any judgment of their own.” At the time, politicians in Massachusetts wanted to allow men who didn't own property to vote. Adams thought that was a bad idea. For him, no property meant no vote.

Adams felt that young people, the poor and illiterate, and many other ordinary citizens lacked the basic judgment needed to cast wise ballots. Most of them, he felt, knew just enough about public policy to be dangerous. If the ballot box was opened to “every man who has not a farthing,” he wrote, then all sorts of other unworthy souls would soon demand the right to vote as well.

'Let's stop saying everyone

Most of the other founding fathers agreed. In 1790, 10 out of the 13 original colonies allowed only property owners to vote. But by 1850, only three of the then-31 states had such property-owner restrictions. Since then, the other efforts to limit access to voting—from a \$2 poll tax in Mississippi to literacy tests—were fought and eventually eliminated.

In fact, in recent decades, there's been a rush to open the ballot box to as many people as possible. Early voting, no-questions-asked absentee ballots, motor-voter laws that allow people to register when they get their driver's license, massive voter registration, and get out the vote campaigns have sought to open up access to the voting booth. In places such as Oregon, Washington, and Colorado, people don't even have to show up at the polls. Instead they vote by mail—with turnout rates that regularly top 60 percent, among the highest rates in the country.

Some, however, feel it's time to give up on the idea that everybody should vote. Fox News commentator John Stossel put it this way: "Why do we have these campaigns saying we have to get all these young people to vote?" he told Bill O'Reilly. "Young people often don't know anything! I'm not saying there should be a test, but let's stop saying everyone should vote."

In the past, those seeking to restrict voting rights resorted to repressive laws, threats, and even violence to keep people from voting. Today the methods used to keep people away from the polls are more subtle and sophisticated. Sometimes it's as mundane as making voting just enough of a hassle that people stay home.

Recent efforts to suppress voting, however, aren't simply attempts to randomly reduce the numbers. They've been, in large part, instituted by Republican legislatures and activists across the country, and the people they affect in the greatest numbers—young voters, people of color—have tended to be groups that have historically supported Democrats.

It turns out that efforts touted as intended to protect the sanctity of the ballot tend to have much more partisan results, if not motives.

WHAT DOES THIS voter suppression strategy look like in its various manifestations

across the country? Here are some of the key tactics that have been attempted—or enacted—that have the result of making it more difficult for some people to exercise their right to vote.

1 Exploit the Myth of Voter Fraud. Want to scare people away from the ballot box? Talk about voter fraud.

Almost half of Americans (48 percent) think that voter fraud is a "major problem," according to a 2012 *Washington Post* poll. And another 33 percent think it's a minor problem. And three-quarter of Americans (74 percent) say that voters should be forced to show ID at the polls. Requiring an ID, the thinking goes, will prevent voter fraud from happening.

Never mind the fact that voter fraud almost never happens. As the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law pointed out in its 2007 report "The Truth about Voter Fraud," a person is more likely to be struck by lightning than to vote under a false name.

Real voter fraud is almost nonexistent, as Justin Levitt, a law professor at Loyola University and author of the Brennan Center report, pointed out in a recent *Washington Post* editorial. Levitt has tracked allegations of voter fraud since the 2007 report came out. He's found 31 credible cases of fraud—out of more than 1 billion votes cast in the time period he studied. Levitt's investigation revealed that most so-called voter fraud turns out to be simple clerical errors—"a problem with matching people from one big computer list to another, or a data entry error, or confusion between two different people with the same name, or someone signing in on the wrong line of a pollbook"—and not fraud after all.

For example, a 2013 investigation by *Newsday* reported that more than 6,100 dead people in Nassau County, N.Y., were still registered to vote. Among them was Evelyn E. Burwell, who voted in the 2012 general election, according to county records—despite being dead since 1997. Burwell was one of about 270 dead people to vote in Nassau County, according to *Newsday*. A clear sign of voter fraud, right? No, according to officials interviewed by *Newsday*. It turned out that, instead of voter fraud, clerical errors and sloppy record keeping were to blame.

In 2014, North Carolina election officials claimed to have found "hundreds of cases" of potential voter fraud in the last presidential election. State elections director Kim Strach told legislators that about 765 voters—out of the state's 6.5 million registered voters—were thought to be suspicious after a "cross-check" of voter records that was mandated by the state legislature. The names and some details were found to be similar to some voters in other states. "Could it be voter fraud? Sure, it could be voter fraud," Strach told the legislators. She also admitted that clerical mistakes could be at fault: "Could it be an error on the part of a precinct person choosing the wrong person's name in the first place? It could be." Even a Fox News report on the case admitted that "other states using the cross-check system have yielded relatively few criminal prosecutions for voter fraud once the cases were thoroughly investigated."

Bob Hall, executive director of the voting rights group Democracy North Carolina, commented on the case: "It's unfortunate that some zealots are using the fear of fraud in a way that can hurt innocent people." As comedian Stephen Colbert put it, in his own "truthy" way, voter fraud doesn't mean that the wrong person voted. "The most insidious form of fraud is people voting wrong," he told his television audience.

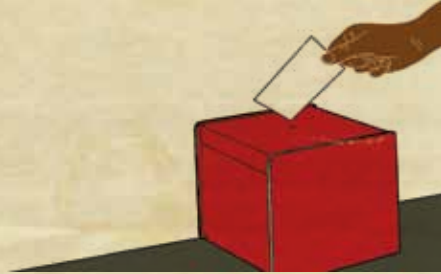
2 Promote Solutions that Don't Work. One of the most popular, and potentially effective, ways to discourage voters is to pass voter photo ID laws. On the surface, such laws sound perfectly reasonable. After all, you need to show ID to start work at a new job, get on an airplane, or sign up for insurance under the Affordable Care Act.

The reality, however, is that many Americans don't have the kind of government-issued photo ID they'd need to vote under these new laws. Among the folks who often don't have the correct IDs are college students, the elderly, anyone who has moved recently, and women who've gotten married and changed their names but haven't updated their ID yet.

All told, about 11 percent of Americans of voting age—21 million people—don't have the proper ID to vote under these laws, according to the Brennan Center, which notes that the percentage is even higher for

should vote.'

—John Stossel,
Fox News



seniors, people of color, people with disabilities, low-income voters, and students. (A 2012 report from the center noted, “People of color are more likely to be disenfranchised by these laws since they are less likely to have photo ID than the general population.”)

Let’s do the math. In North Carolina, there are 6.5 million registered voters. That means as many as 715,000 voters would be turned away at the polls under the new laws. Even if all 765 of those cases turned out to merit prosecution—a very unlikely scenario—the result would be one case of alleged fraud for every 935 people denied the right to vote under the ID law.

Despite the miniscule risk of voter fraud, and the harm that voter ID laws could cause, at least 34 states have passed laws requiring voters to show IDs. Some of those laws—including the one in North Carolina—are on hold due to court challenges. In Virginia, according to *The Washington Post*, some 300,000 voters lack the proper ID to vote under new restrictions recently put in place by the state’s board of elections.

The myth of voter fraud is a particularly effective way to get people to do the wrong thing, at precisely the wrong time, with a great sense of urgency. It’s a technique that British author C.S. Lewis described in his book *The Screwtape Letters*: “The game is to have them all running about with fire extinguishers when there is a flood, and all crowding to that side of the boat which is already nearly gunwale under.”

3 Make People Think They Can’t Vote. Another issue with these new laws is that few people read the fine print. For example, people can still vote early in North Carolina and many other states, albeit in a tighter time period, despite the widespread perception that early voting has been eliminated. And even people who lack an ID can vote under a new photo ID law in Virginia. If they forget their ID, election workers will give voters a provisional ballot to use on Election Day.

All a voter has to do is come back to the election board with a valid ID, and their vote will be counted. And if they don’t have an ID, workers at the election board will take their picture and make them an official voter ID card on the spot, free of charge. The problem, of course, is that it’s often hard enough

getting people to come out to vote once, especially in non-presidential-election years. Getting them to come back a second time to get their vote to count can be a bridge too far.

Rosanne Scott of Alexandria, Va., is convinced the new law will prevent people without ID from voting. Her 89-year-old father, a WWII vet and registered Republican, no longer has a driver’s license. “Thanks to the Republicans, my father, who served this country well and who is as mentally sharp as anyone I know, no longer can vote in Virginia,” she told *The Washington Post* in a letter to the editor.

Don Yelton, a GOP activist and precinct captain in Buncombe County, N.C., isn’t worried that voter participation will drop in certain demographics. “I can’t believe we’ve got that many stupid people in North Carolina, people that don’t know how to follow directions to go down there and get a photo ID for free at the DMV,” he told *The Daily Show*. “Do you want those people picking your president? ... If it hurts a bunch of college kids that’s too lazy to get off their bohunkas and get a photo ID, so be it.”

4 Put Up Small Roadblocks to Voting. Americans don’t like overt attempts to stop people from voting. One way around those fears is to enact relatively small inconveniences that make it just a little bit harder to vote. It’s the difference between putting up a roadblock and speed bumps. Voter ID laws are one such speed bump.

Cutting the number of early voting days is another. In North Carolina, the legislature recently passed a law that, among other things, reduced early voting from 17 days down to 10 days. A federal court recently ruled that the law was constitutional. The court decided the reduced number of days was enough, said UCLA law professor and blogger Rick Hasen in an August blog post. “The court held that there were still ample opportunities to vote under even the truncated dates,” he wrote. The reduced early voting period doesn’t affect every constituency equally; for example, 70 percent of African-American voters used early voting in 2012.

That same law also added other restrictions. Voters are no longer allowed to register on Election Day. Teenagers—specifically 16- and 17-year-olds—are no longer allowed to

register early. And groups that organize voter registration drives can no longer pay workers incentives for registering more voters. And if someone votes in the wrong precinct—even if a poll worker is to blame—his or her vote won’t count.

The new rules will likely prevail in court because they don’t actually prevent people from voting. They just discourage people from taking part in the process.

AFRICAN AMERICANS, women, people who are poor, and others had to fight hard for the right to vote. They won that right with blood, sweat, and tears. Some even paid with their lives.

Voting rights aren’t to be taken for granted, and people across the country—and across the political spectrum—have expressed their concern about efforts to curtail those rights. For instance, a *Washington Post* poll in 2012 found that 73 percent of Americans worried that “voter suppression”—attempts to prevent citizens from registering to vote or from casting ballots—is a problem, and 41 percent named it as a “major” problem.

But the sad reality is that if voting is made more difficult for African Americans and other minorities, many white Americans won’t hear about it because of the “resegregation” of U.S. society. As authors Bill Bishop and Robert Cushing describe in their book *The Big Sort*, most Americans socialize with “people who live, think, and vote like we do.” We hardly ever talk or hang out with people who are different than us. And the social networks of white Americans are especially segregated. According to a poll by the Washington, D.C.-based Public Religion Research Institute, “the social networks of whites are a remarkable 93 percent white.”

If voting rights are to be protected in this country, people will have to cross boundaries of race and class and reach out beyond their usual networks, social and otherwise. Those who are trying to make it more difficult to vote are organized and active. Countering their efforts will take at least the same level of commitment from those who think it’s important to keep the voting booth open to all. ■

Bob Smietana is senior writer for Facts and Trends magazine and a freelance religion writer based in Nashville.

BY JONATHAN KUTTAB

BROKEN CISTERNS

Before it fell apart earlier this year, and before this summer's carnage in Gaza, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was already fatally flawed.

My people have committed two sins: They have abandoned me, the spring of living waters, and have dug for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns ... that hold no water. —Jeremiah 2:13

IN THE LATE 1980S and early '90s, Palestinians rose up against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories in what became known as the First Intifada. Instead of acceding to the demands for justice by the “children of the stones,” the response was a process of talks that led to the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993.

The “peace process” engaged the leadership of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization)—then weak, corrupt, exiled, and with little vision or support—in what turned out to be a worse-than-fruitless effort that led to the perpetuation of the occupation and suffering of the Palestinian people, and which made a just peace even further away.

The process was intriguing to many of us in the peace and justice community, and it successfully co-opted us, as it co-opted the Palestinian leadership, but this process entailed both the abandoning of principled positions and the adoption of the Oslo system, a broken system that could not possibly deliver what it promised.

We were treated to a new language by Israel and the U.S., which seemed at first blush to adopt our own slogans: Where Palestinians were constantly complaining of Israel's refusal to acknowledge them—its demonization of their leadership, and trying to have Jordan or other local collaborators speak on their behalf—the new process brazenly invited the PLO itself and its leader Yasser Arafat to participate as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.”

Uriel Sinai/Getty Images



A Palestinian protester weeps as Israeli soldiers block her way from a West Bank village being threatened by a settlement expansion.



The fact that the PLO was not allowed to speak on behalf of two-thirds of the Palestinian people (the refugees in exile) or for those who were citizens of Israel was not initially clear, and Yasser Arafat was exalted as a leader beyond reproach. His own failures in the area of transparency and his undemocratic actions were politely overlooked, as were the failures of Yitzhak Rabin, his Israeli counterpart, since both were viewed as men of peace, and we wanted to give peace a chance by giving them room to maneuver rather than stubbornly insisting on principles.

The slogan of “direct negotiations,” a very legitimate idea, was also turned on its head. The negotiations process neatly sidestepped international law, the United Nations, and European and Arab countries and allowed Israel to negotiate directly with the PLO with no involvement from any third party. In effect, it provided a forum for the wolf and the sheep to work out their culinary relationship with no outside interference.

The continuing human rights abuses and the illegal settlement activities were also downplayed, since these issues were supposedly actively under negotiation, and it was deemed necessary to give both parties an opportunity to work out their differences. People of goodwill, both inside and outside the area, were urged to support the peace process and help the moderates engaged in it against the extremists who were trying to derail it.

Meanwhile, the negotiations lent legitimacy not only to existing settlements and their expansion but to the creation of a sophisticated structure of two separate systems of life, one for Jews and another for Arabs in the occupied territories, with separate roads, schools, health systems, social security, courts, and police, and not merely different laws and separate living quarters for the two communities.

The slogan of a Palestinian state was also co-opted with the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which was given some of the trappings of a state without any of its powers or sovereignty. In fact, the PA was specifically designed to serve as a subcontractor for the occupation to control its own people on behalf of the occupiers, while beholden to the Israelis and the donor community for its own salaries.

How did this happen?

The truth is that these early days were very heady and exhilarating days as we, and I include myself, witnessed the handshake on the lawn of the White House, saw the Nobel Peace Prize given, and heard our very own slogans repeated as official policy of the U.S. State

Department. We were no longer “voices crying in the wilderness” or marginalized, unrealistic idealists but invited, honored guests in the hallways and corridors of power and decision-making.

The price of toning down our principled criticism, accepting some measure of “realism,” and making concessions in order to give peace a chance seemed a small enough price to pay. The alternative seemed to put us in the camp of rejectionists, extremists, and radicals who did not believe in peace at all and who were bent on hatred and enmity. So we went along and, before we knew it, the trap snapped shut and we were caught.

In fact, as extremists from both sides continued to practice and preach violence and even assassinated Rabin, we became even more invested in the “peace process” and in seeking ways to salvage it or help it survive. In other words, the broken cisterns became our own.

So how were the cisterns broken? And why could they not deliver the outcome they promised? We need to understand the mechanisms of the peace process to appreciate why the cisterns were fundamentally broken.

FIRST: A process was created (the Oslo Framework) that was both divorced from principles and organs of international law and the international community and that also declared itself to be the one and only proper forum for discussing and resolving the conflict. Any attempt to appeal to international organs, the United Nations, or other bodies was specifically prohibited by the terms of the Oslo process.

Similarly, attempts to engage or involve third parties (or indeed for the Palestinian people to be involved in any anti-occupation activity) would also be viewed as contrary to the peace process. No mechanism was created to enforce compliance with

the agreement, so Israel could and did regularly violate its terms (such as allowing free passage between Gaza and the West Bank), but Palestinians were strictly held to their obligations under it, and Israel had a variety of sanctions available to penalize them for doing so.

SECOND: The process accurately reflected the power relationship between the parties and was specifically engineered to grant the powerful party clear advantages and to maintain the dependence and weakness of the weaker party. Under the terms of the signed agreement, issues of concern to Israel (such as security, control of borders, settlements,

etc.) were specifically relegated to its sole authority and control. Issues of concern to Palestinians, however, were relegated, instead, to joint committees where Israel had veto power.

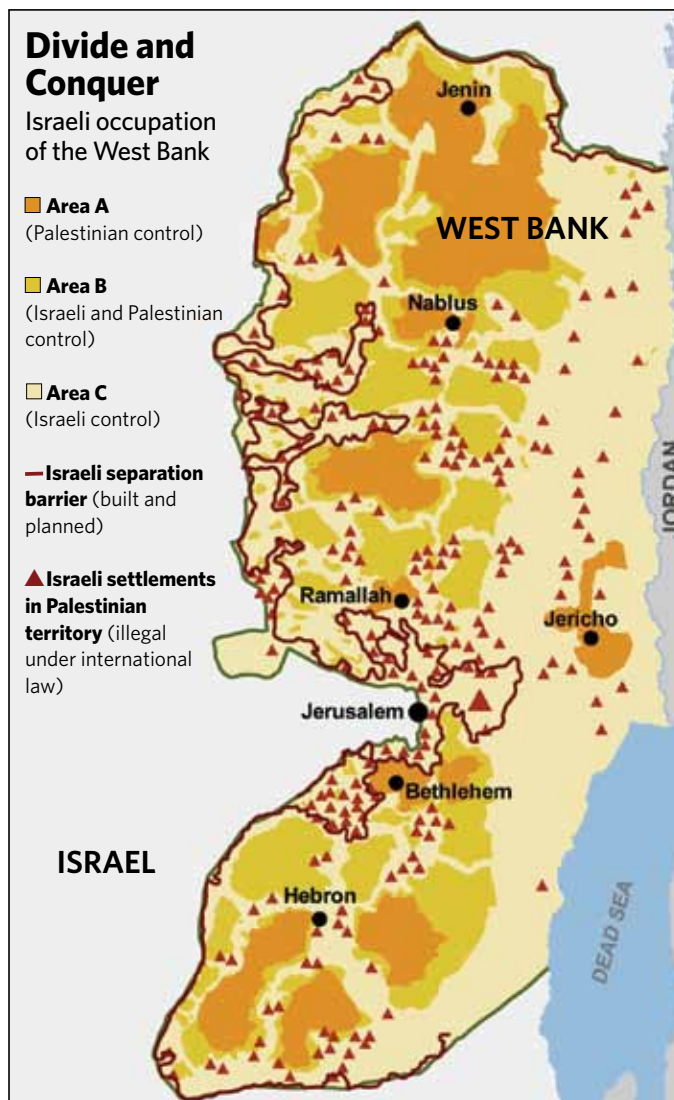
The Palestinian Authority was therefore required on a daily basis to submit to the joint committees requests for everything from permits for people’s travel to the supply of water, fuel, and electricity, to imports and exports, to designating radio frequencies for broadcasting—everything! Even customs and import duties for West Bank goods were collected by Israel (with 25 percent withheld for “administrative services”) and turned over to the Palestinian Authority only if the PA remained on good terms with Israel. When cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis broke down, the PA was paralyzed.

THIRD: The Palestinian Territories were divided into noncontiguous parcels labeled A, B, and C. Area A (comprising the densely populated cities and towns) was under the control of the Palestinian Authority; Area B (mostly villages) was under joint Israeli-Palestinian control, with the PA having responsibilities in civil matters and Israel in security matters; and Area C

(about 62 percent of the West Bank)—containing all the settlements, the Jordan valley, and all the empty land in between—was under full control of Israel and its civil administration.

The theory was that the powers of the PA would gradually increase both in substance and territory as more land was transferred from C to B and then to A, ending up with a fully sovereign Palestinian state.

FOURTH: Within the areas “ceded” to Palestinian control, the PA was essentially required to act as subcontractors for Israel and serve its interests, especially in security matters. The PA was required to control its



The peace process provided a forum for the wolf and the sheep to work out their culinary relationship with no outside interference.

Palestinians march through the West Bank city of Hebron in a nonviolent demonstration on the anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem in 1967.

population and provide continuing security cooperation with the Israeli forces. Where the PA failed to act sufficiently, Israel permitted its forces frequent incursions and forays into Area A.

The Palestinians had correctly decided to end armed struggle against the occupation and to cooperate in preventing attacks against Israel, yet Israel (and sometimes the PA) viewed this as requiring them to end all forms of struggle as well. PA police officers were required to prevent Palestinians from moving to points of contact and friction with Israelis for purposes of demonstrating, and when Palestinians acted politically in ways Israel did not like, the PA police were accused of failing in their assigned functions under the agreements.

FIFTH: The process was an integral part of Israel's ideological policy of *havrada* (separation). The model of "they are there and we are here" was first readily accepted even by the peace community in Israel and elsewhere as a form of self-determination and neighborly coexistence. When security cooperation between the PA and Israel broke down with the Second Intifada, which began in 2000, this philosophy was reinforced with the building of the separation wall, which confirmed in concrete terms the policy of separation between Israel and Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza.

Each of these elements—all basic ingredients of the Oslo peace process—run contrary to notions of justice, reconciliation, and peace. They serve the Israeli goals of the occupation, fragment the Palestinian people, foster discrimination, co-opt and shackle their leaders into a subservient role, and legalize and legitimize the continuing occupation, while blocking as illegitimate all avenues of working toward a just solution. A "peace process" built on these principles necessarily would fail to produce justice or peace, and serves only to perpetuate and legitimize the occupation. ■

Jonathan Kuttab, a Palestinian Christian and human rights activist, co-founded the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence and headed the legal committee that negotiated the PLO-Israeli agreement creating the Palestinian Authority in 1994.



Ryan Rodrick Beiler

Principles for Prophetic Action in the Middle East

As Christians concerned about peace and justice, this time of crisis in the Middle East provides us an opportunity to return to our principles, the "springs of living waters" for people of faith:

■ **We need to oppose both anti-Semitism as well as any form of discrimination and racism against Palestinian Arabs.** Solutions that promote or tolerate discriminatory and racist institutions and practices should be forthrightly condemned. Settlements, illegal under international law and discriminatory against Palestinians, need to be rejected rather than tolerated and legitimized.

■ **We need to work for justice,** which requires that we work for a solution that levels the playing field rather than seek a "realistic" approach that reflects the balance of power between the parties, necessarily favoring the strong against the weak.

■ **We need to seek reconciliation and peace between the parties,** rather than assuming eternal hostility and enmity between the parties.

■ **We need to build bridges, not walls,** and seek arrangements that maximize freedom of movement, cooperation, and contacts rather than separation and avoidance.

■ **We need to again reassert our commitment to international law,** international institutions, and universal values.

■ **We need to promote human rights and the principles of democracy and human respect.** Where abuses occur, by either party, we should be ready to speak out and act against them.

■ **We must be willing to take prophetic stands grounded in our principles against injustice,** even if they are unpopular, run against established interests, or risk our paying a personal price.

■ **Most of all, we must insist on our prophetic role** when it comes to injustices and evils, but be humble when it comes to our abilities to create a political solution.

The appeal to be involved in "solving the problem" must be resisted if it forces us to abandon our principles since, at the end of the day, we will be left both without a just solution and without the moral authority of a principled prophetic stand. —Jonathan Kuttab



ONE IN THE LORD

A look at three multiracial churches—and how they got that way.

MULTIRACIAL CHURCHES are becoming more common in this country—but that doesn't happen by chance.

A 2010 study by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, based on a random sample of more than 11,000 congregations, revealed an increase in multiracial congregations in the U.S.—30 percent of churches reported that more than half of their members were part of minority groups.

Members of three multiracial churches in and near the nation's capital—one Catholic, one Methodist, and one nondenominational—say that at their church “people don't look the same, or think that much about it,” and describe their congregations as welcoming places “where you can feel God's presence, where you can be yourself.”

Though Sunday worship time is still known as “the most segregated hour in America,” older members of churches such as Peace Fellowship Church in Washington, D.C., St. Camillus Catholic Church in Silver Spring, Md., and Culmore United Methodist Church in Falls Church, Va., remember when things started changing. As migration and demographic shifts altered neighborhoods and communities, members sought to engage in “desegregated” worship, opting to join communities that mirrored a world with different cultures and ways to praise God.

Reconciling Divisions

Dave Cho, a Korean-American who started attending Peace Fellowship Church in 2008 with his family, said he felt welcomed by Dennis Edwards, the founding pastor.

“Rev. Edwards' philosophy is to reach out to people on the margins,” Cho said. “We didn't

know anybody. About 60 percent [of the congregants] were African American. We didn't have much in common other than our faith.”

Faith was enough. Even though Peace Fellowship, a small, nondenominational community in the Deanwood neighborhood of Washington, D.C., did not set out to be a multiracial church, it welcomes everyone.

Edwards' original goal was to “create disciples east of the Anacostia River” and to be relevant to the predominantly African-American, working-class community surrounding the church. “We were only intentional about love,” Edwards stated, “and being a bridge for people who are different.”

Nearly 14 years ago, Edwards and a group of members from his former church founded Peace Fellowship after attending a church-planting conference. Peace Fellowship has a diverse congregation, both ethnically and economically. Churchgoers come from both middle and upper classes across the District, with an estimated 80 percent of the church evenly divided between blacks and whites, an additional 10 percent being Asian American, and the remaining being of mixed or international backgrounds.

Peace Fellowship's new pastor, James Ellis, explained that as the U.S. continues to become more and more diverse, churches will too—but not without some growing pains. “If someone doesn't look like you or share your same experiences, it can be seen as a challenge,” he said. “Or it can promote authentic conversations about race and theology and help people to begin their journey with God, forming a real community.”

“Race has been a vexing problem in the U.S.,” said Ray McGhee, an African-American church founder. “Multiracial congregations are a

Members of Peace Fellowship Church in Washington, D.C.
Below, some of the 2013 confirmation class presented at St. Camillus in Silver Spring, Md.



testimony of healing and reconciliation.”

Peace Fellowship values relationships and resists traditional structures. Many of the members are young adults who prefer a place that does not ask them to identify themselves as part of one racial group or as part of the dominant white Christian culture. “We tend to attract families that are multiracial,” added Kristi McGhee, Ray’s wife and fellow church founder. “A good number of families, including my own, are mixed.”

Ray McGhee believes now that the church has a new pastor, Peace Fellowship can expand its work in the community, particularly in mentoring youth. “We’re trying to minister to the community around the church,” he explained. “We’re taking the attention off ourselves and focusing on the community in ways that show respect and humility, and that help us to learn more about how to support each other.”

But just as peace does not happen overnight, Ellis added that having unity in their multiracial congregation would not happen immediately.

“We recognize that it’s a long journey, and we’ll engage people who do not always see things the same way,” Ellis said. “And that’s okay. God is the one who holds everything together.”

A Multitude of Nations

St. Camillus Catholic Church, known affectionately as “The U.N. of Silver Spring,” continues to embrace the diversity of its changing Maryland neighborhood and currently ministers to people from 105 different countries.

Founded in 1950, the congregation was predominantly white until waves of immigrants from Latin America, Africa, and Asia moved near the church during the 1980s. For the past 30 years, the church has been intentional about cultivating a space for its 4,000 parishioners to feel at home.

Martin Bednar, the first Franciscan friar to pastor St. Camillus, said the process of becoming a multicultural congregation was a gradual one. Months after the church began to hold a regular Mass in Spanish, the Latino population at the church grew to 200. Years later, it approached 1,400.

The friar also offered services to help the surrounding community. Later, he welcomed Vietnamese Catholics and other migrants

Not everyone was happy, however, with the community becoming multicultural. “In the old days, there was a real disagreement,” Bednar explained. “Some old timers said this was their parish, and they did not like the idea of these people taking over. Many left.”

To address the crisis, the friar instituted a parish festival in 1984, with food and cultural programs to bring the different communities together. Various ministries invited members of the other communities to participate, and friendships were forged. Some of the descendants of European immigrants who left came back. “We saw real growth,” Bednar said. “They were able to see the value that the others had.”

In 2000, a French-speaking African community with eight families became part of the church, with a worship service in their own language; it now has nearly 900 members from 14 countries. The parish also welcomes Bangladeshi and Creole-speaking Haitian communities.

The various groups know that focusing on their cultural differences can divide them into mere factions sharing a roof, but they see each other more like strands woven into the same fabric. “African, Spanish, Anglo—there is no difference,” said Louis Kimmakon, president of the African community. “We are just one body and one Christ.”

“It’s a balance between unity and diversity,” added Father Mike Johnson, one of the current pastors. “People celebrate their cultures, and they feel at home. But the church is bigger than any one group. We are enriched by being with one another, and that pushes people out of their comfort zones.”

St. Camillus has also been intentional about making sure the major communities



are represented on the parish council. “It’s a place where their concerns and voices can be heard as part of the larger structure,” explained Sister Kristin Matthes, SND. “It’s a family. The benefit of one is the benefit of all.”

With their Catholic faith in common, all the groups have embraced the mission brought to St. Camillus by the Franciscans to strive for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation for all God’s creatures, said Ottoniel Perez, the Latino community minister. “The homilies awaken a consciousness beyond an ethnic group,” Perez stated. “The faith asks us to take the gospel to those who are at the margins of society.”

To build these bridges, St. Camillus facilitates intercultural activities, such as opportunities to discuss spirituality together. The church also offers multicultural Masses in English with music in different languages and multilingual readings during Easter and Advent.

Father Jacek Orzechowski, another St. Camillus friar, said that it is important for the multicultural ministry to extend its commitment to justice and peace beyond its own ethnic community. “It’s not only diversity for the sake of diversity,” he said. “It’s about growing deeper in a commitment to the mission of the church.”

Loving Your Neighbor

"I thought I was seeing a glimpse of heaven," said Rev. Jung Pyo Hong, describing his first visit to Culmore United Methodist Church, where he now serves as pastor. A small church in Falls Church, Va., Culmore describes itself as "a house of prayer for all nations" and genuinely welcomes and nurtures all "to be Christ to others."

What surprised Hong was how different ethnicities managed to share life together on Sunday—without engaging in tokenism. According to Hong, the church's demographics consist of Asians (40 percent), Africans from Sierra Leone and Ghana (35 percent), and people of other nationalities (25 percent).

Culmore's outreach activities include a boys and girls club, ESL classes, advocacy for immigration reform and affordable housing, and support for day laborers and the homeless. The church also cultivates spirituality through Bible study groups and Filipino vespers.

Roseanne Salonga, a lay leader from the Philippines, returned to Culmore seven



Rev. Jung Pyo Hong
of Culmore United
Methodist Church in
Falls Church, Va.

moved away, and the patterns of immigration that fueled the congregation have plateaued.

Though many of the immigrants joining Culmore practice the Western-style Methodist service on Sundays, there is a conscious effort to invite all—long-timer, newcomer, old, and young—to participate during worship. During the high seasons, more cultural expressions are added to the mix.

Leslie Atkins, a white lay leader, indicated that seeing her friends experience Christ in different ways has deepened her faith. "You learn by being around people and hearing them give their faith story," she said.

Carol McSween-Brooks, who is African American, pointed out that church diversity can create schisms, which can start over musical preferences across generations or the goals and mission of the church. "We are still working on worshiping together and building the church," she said.

"Sometimes Filipinos, Africans, and Anglos can be three separate groups, three tribes," Salonga said. "It would be nice if we just forgot about being Filipino or being American and just accepted each other. It

"If someone doesn't look like you, it can be seen as a challenge. Or it can promote authentic conversations about race and theology."

years ago. It was a very different church, she said, than the one she left in the 1970s.

Culmore began in 1952 as an Anglo, middle-class congregation in northern Virginia. As more immigrant families came to the area, they found an open-minded, welcoming place. Rev. Stephen Rhodes, a former Culmore pastor and author of *Where the Nations Meet the Church in a Multicultural World*, said that embracing an identity as an international church helped to resurrect it at a time when membership was low and financial problems abounded.

"The neighborhood served as a prime location for waves of immigrants," Hong said. "They could walk to church, and they brought their relatives."

Now the congregation has dwindled to 100 members, in part because many of the original Anglo members have died or

makes you practice what Christianity is all about."

To do this, the leaders of each community meet every two weeks. This has caused them to rediscover one another and put their assumptions to rest.

Hong thinks that the congregation is a place to grow together.

"That is the saving grace for Culmore, not just the diversity—as important and wonderful as it is—but that leadership is able to work through its assumptions about one another and bring their values to the table," Hong said. "If you can come into some level of discomfort and be okay with that, you will not only be receiving the gospel—you'll be practicing it." ■

Maria-Pia Negro is a bilingual multimedia journalist who freelances in Washington, D.C.



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BY SEÁN McDONAGH

FORTY SHADES OF GREEN

The oldest known redwood in the United States was a sapling during the Babylonian exile. Why trees should be part of Christian core curriculum.

I GREW UP IN RURAL IRELAND in the 1950s in a world surrounded by trees.

Close to my home, a ribbon of horse chestnuts lined both sides of the road. Each summer their intertwining canopies shut out the light, which gave the road its name—the dark road. In the fields around our house there were stands of oak, birch, elm, and sycamore. About 40 yards to the south and west, my father planted a shelter belt of Leylandii. We had different varieties of apple trees in the orchard, and two pear trees.

In 1962, just as the Second Vatican Council was beginning, I entered St. Columban's seminary to be a priest. The seminary was located on a large estate called Dowdstown in County Meath. More than 150 acres were covered



in woodlands full of indigenous trees such as oak, hazel, holly, ash, Scotch pine, willow, elm, and rowan. There were also exotic species, including a number of the sturdy cedars of Lebanon, a variety of cherry trees, and even a few California redwoods. The folklore in the area was that the trees had been planted in the 1820s by Gen. Robert Taylor, who had fought alongside Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo.

Trees are the dominant life form on land — and the longest-lived creatures on earth. During my seven years in seminary, while studying philosophy, theology, spirituality, and scripture, we never once looked to the natural world or trees for insight into our relationship with God, other human beings, or other species. And there is so much to learn! Sadly, theology and scripture presentations were isolated almost exclusively to the divine-human relationship, with little consideration given to the rest of creation.

This is due in part to the legacy of the early church fathers, who elaborated their theology of creation in the context of the prevailing teaching of Gnosticism and Manichaeism, both of which tended to despise the material world and basic bodily functions. As a result, at seminary in County Meath in the early 1960s, the woodlands were out of bounds for the students. We were not encouraged to give trees the basic respect of learning their names. (Little has changed in the intervening four decades in churches, seminaries, or divinity schools.)

The General Sherman, a 2,400-year-old giant sequoia in California, is purportedly the world's largest living tree.

Vines, Branches, and Superstorms

The Bible, on the other hand, is replete with a theology of trees and the environment. In chapter 15 of his gospel, John presents Jesus as the true vine: “I am the true vine, and my Abba is the vine grower” (John 15:1). The believers are the branches, but they cannot bear fruit unless they are joined to and sustained by the vine tree. “Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:4-5). The author of John’s gospel makes it very clear that the dynamic relationship between the trunk and the branches is an apt metaphor for the active, engaging relationship between Christ and the believer.

The vine and branches also instruct us on the dynamic relationships in our world. There is no good fruit if the vine and roots are damaged or severed. The devastating, interconnected effects of climate change reveal this in the most catastrophic ways.

In 2012 and 2013, the Philippines was hit by two super typhoons—Bopha and Haiyan. More than 7,000 people died. Homes, schools, roads, and other vital infrastructures were destroyed. What is forgotten is the long-term damage that typhoons do to the environment when tree cover is removed. A study carried out in Central America in the 1980s showed that a single rainstorm can dislodge up to 150,000 kilograms (331,000 pounds) of top soil from one hectare (2-1/2 acres) of hillside once the trees have been cut. The comparable figure from a forested hillside is a mere 44 kilograms. Intact forests regulate water run-off and thus mitigate the risks of flooding and droughts. Conversely, the destruction of forests also impacts rainfall. Cutting trees leads to a reduction in evaporation and transpiration that in turn leads to less rainfall. On hydrological grounds alone, protecting forests is essential for the future of food production.

Cedars of Lebanon and California Redwoods

In scripture, trees set the moral and religious context for the lives of both the individual believer and the community. For example, many of the majestic cedars of Lebanon grew to a height of 120 feet and often lived for more than 1,000 years. The long life and erect stance of cedars represented a symbolic challenge for humans. For the psalmist, “the righteous

flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar of Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. In old age, they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap showing that the Lord is upright” (Psalm 92:12-15).

In North America, the equivalent of the cedar of Lebanon is the California redwood. Redwoods are the tallest trees found on the planet. Some have reached heights of 360 feet. Redwoods are also among the longest-lived trees on earth. Unless disturbed, a redwood can live between 500 to 1,000 years. In 2013, researchers discovered a 2,520-year-old redwood, which beats the previous record-holder by 300 years. No wonder the Latin name for redwood, *Sequoia sempervirens*, means “green forever.”

During the Cretaceous period, more than 100 million years ago, redwoods were among the predominant trees found in the forests of a much more moist and tropical North America. As the climate became drier and colder, the redwoods retreated to a narrow strip along the Pacific coast of northern California, where summer fog and mild winters contrast with harsher inland climates.

Unlike their tree cousins in the tropical forests, which are devastated by climate change-related superstorms, recent research seems to confirm that the old-growth redwood forests along the California coast and in the Sierra Nevada are in a “growth spurt the likes of which has never been seen before.” The director of science for Save the Redwood League believes that this unprecedented growth is due to global warming. So while climate change is wreaking havoc on other creatures and ecosystems, from polar bears to coral reefs, it is spurring growth in the redwood forests in California. The trunks are adding girth, report the scientists, and storing large amounts of carbon dioxide. Our sequoia elders are compensating for extremely high atmospheric carbon levels, but they are also preparing for a long, hot, dry millennium that will be climactically adverse to fostering seedlings, laying in now as much growth as possible.

A Community of Trees

What do the trees know that we have yet to learn? Trees stand at the hub of communities. Community is at the heart of the Christian message, from our belief in the nature of a

Trinitarian God to our understanding of the communal dimension of human flourishing, and to our current understanding that all life on earth is connected and interdependent. The oak trees here at St. Columban’s support about 300 other forms of life. The numbers in the tropical forests are beyond our wildest dreams. Harvard entomologist Edward O. Wilson described “a single leguminous tree” in the Tambopata Reserve in Peru that had 43 species of ants belonging to 26 genera.

During the past decade, redwood researchers from Humboldt State University in northern California have made some remarkable discoveries about the community of life in the stands of old-growth forests. Climbing more than 300 feet up into the canopy of ancient redwood forests, the researchers have found a complete ecosystem of birds, bugs, salamanders, ferns, shrubs, and whole trees, growing high up in and above the fog belt. These upper-forest “epiphytes” include many fern species, and such trees and shrubs as tanbark oak, California bay, cascara buckthorn, Sitka spruce, Douglas fir, and Western hemlock. A whole ecosystem lives in the tree canopy! My understanding of the nature of the church and of Christian community would have been enhanced if I, and my teachers, had paid more attention to the world of trees during our discussions.

Building Great Houses

Talk of trees and plants almost always involves politics and economics. Visitors to Ireland from across the world comment on the greenness and beauty of the country, the Emerald Isle. There was even a popular Johnny Cash song celebrating the “40 shades of green,” reflecting the range of Irish grass species. Over the past few decades, however, intensive agriculture has been on the rise. Ireland’s “40 shades” have been dwindling down to one: the shiny dark green of perennial ryegrass. Farmers use it because livestock find it palatable, but it requires high nitrogen levels from fossil-fuel based fertilizers for it to achieve maximum productivity.

The demise of the Irish forests is intimately related to the political and economic issues of the time. According to pollen analysis, the first tree to reach Ireland, after the last glacial period, was the juniper. It was followed quickly by pine, hazel, and rowan

Dave Morgan
trees. By 8,500 B.C.E., Ireland had established oak and elm forests. Humans arrived in Ireland about 1,000 years later as hunters-gatherers who made little enough impact on the landscape. With the rise of agriculture, however, they cut the trees to open up pasture land.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, much of the oak was shipped abroad to build the great houses of Britain (not unlike King Solomon clear-cutting the cedars of Lebanon for his temple). Ireland's trees were used to make charcoal for the burgeoning industrial revolution in England. By the time of the Act of Union in 1800 (forming the United Kingdom), only 2 percent of Ireland was covered by woodlands, despite the fact that Ireland has the best growing conditions for trees of almost any country in Europe. Since achieving independence in 1921, successive Irish governments have promoted forest projects. As a result, in 2014, nearly 10 percent of Ireland is forested again. Unfortunately, priority has been given to planting Sitka spruce, a North American import, rather than to native species such as ash and oak.

Pope Francis and the New World Coming

If contemporary Christian communities could see ourselves as part of the wider community of life, then it would help shape our ethical, political, and economic consensus to guide human interaction with trees, forests, and the wider natural world, which would lead to a mutually enhancing relationship between humans and the rest of creation, instead of the predatory relationship that is now in place.

Various Christian churches are only now beginning to take the global environmental crisis more seriously. During the 1980s, the World Council of Churches adopted the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) ministry. Meetings were held in a variety of countries and continents culminating in the March 1990 meeting in Seoul, Korea. The Catholic Church has been somewhat slower in responding to the crisis. Even though the environment is mentioned in a number of social encyclicals such as *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* ("The Concern of the Church for the Social Order," 1987), the first document devoted exclusively to addressing the ecological issue was announced by Pope



The old-growth redwood forests along the California coast are in a "growth spurt the likes of which has never been seen before."

John Paul II on World Peace Day in January 1990, titled "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation."

It is obvious that Pope Francis is very concerned about the deteriorating ecological situation right across the globe. In his inaugural homily in March 2013, he appealed to all who have positions of responsibility in economic, political, and social life, and all people of goodwill: "Let us be 'protectors' of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment. Let us not allow omens of destruction and death to accompany the advance of this world!"

In *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel"), which many people see as the blueprint for Pope Francis' ministry, he makes his own "the touching and prophetic lament voiced some years ago by the bishops of the Philippines: 'An incredible variety of insects lived in the forests and were busy with all kinds of tasks. ... Birds flew through the air, their bright plumes and varying calls adding color and song to the green of the forests. ... God intended this land for us, [God's] special creatures, but not so that we might destroy it and turn it into a wasteland. ... After a single night's rain, look at

the chocolate brown rivers in your locality and remember that they are carrying the life blood of the land into the sea. ... How can fish swim in running sewers like the Pasig [in Manila] and so many more rivers that we have polluted? Who has turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of color and life?"

Many commentators believe that Pope Francis soon will issue an encyclical on God's creation, climate change, and the role of the human in the sanctity of creation. Hopefully, such a document will help the Christian community around the world see itself as part of the wider community of life, encouraging us to celebrate the beauty and wonders of forests and trees with poets, musicians, and other artists. Only then will Christians develop mutually enhancing relationships between humanity and the rest of creation. ■

Seán McDonagh, SSC, is an Irish Columban missionary priest who worked for more than two decades in the Philippines. His book To Care for the Earth (1986) was one of the first theological books to address the ecological crisis. His most recent book is Fukushima: The Death Knell for Nuclear Energy? The Japanese Tsunami 2011 (Columba Press).



Getty Images

The Problem of Big and Small

IT'S REASONABLY clear to me that the natural tendency of our society at this moment is toward smallness, localness, and intimacy. After several centuries of constantly extending our supply lines around the world so that our food and our energy and our capital came from every corner of the planet, we find it increasingly pleasing and increasingly necessary to hunker down.

Local food is the best example. Our best restaurants and our sharpest cooks are no longer concerned with copying French recipes; for a generation now it's been all about

there's even a move toward Slow Money and local banking. It's possible to imagine how it might all fit together into something quite beautiful—a new/old world that actually kind of works, instead of the careening one we're used to.

But there's one small problem. Actually, one large problem—the largest we've ever faced. The devastation from climate change threatens to undo every one of these sweet trends (if it doesn't rain for a month, it doesn't matter how organic your farm is; ditto if it rains every day). And climate change, given the time that we have, can only be solved on very large scales. Say the United States—greatest of carbon sinners—somehow decided to sober up and get its house in order. Even in that dream world, you'd still need to persuade the developing world to go along.

So in some other sense, we've never needed our largest scale institutions more: the U.N., the World Bank, all those semi-corrupt agencies that seem mostly to talk the talk while the corporations and governments simply walk right over them. I wish it weren't so: I wish I could just concentrate on Vermont, where I live. But Vermont can't be Vermont

unless we can get the world moving in the right direction. And it isn't fair anyway, since the last hundred years of American history is a big reason others are suffering.

The best test, then, of the world's seriousness going forward may well be what it does about financing the rest of the world's conversion to renewable energy. In Copenhagen in 2009, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton promised that the rich nations would come up with \$100 billion annually in “public, private, and other” funding to help with this transition. It's the bare minimum required, but since then there's been no solid plan about where it will come from or who will pay.

Hunkering down is deeply attractive and deeply useful. It should be a far more local world (with the wildcard of the internet to keep it from getting too provincial). But before we go about our own business, there's the outstanding problem of global warming to take care of. We need to somehow get big enough to deal with it before we get pleasantly small. ■



Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.

Hunkering down is deeply attractive, but we have work to do first.

what's close to home. Farmers' markets have been the fastest growing part of our food economy, and suddenly there are more breweries than there were before Prohibition. It tastes good; it feels neighborly.

Next on the agenda: local energy. All of a sudden it seems weird to be piping stuff in from Saudi Arabia, or even Texas, when there's plenty of good sunshine to be had close to home, when the wind blows over your house more days than not. In the wake of the financial crisis,

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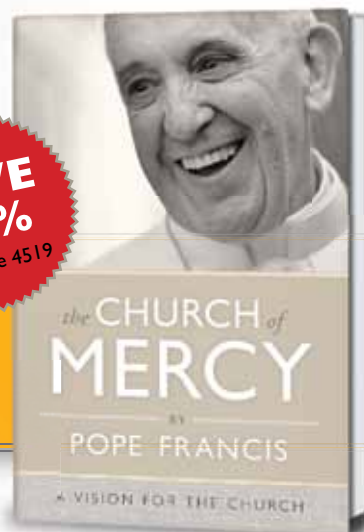
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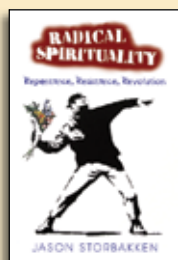
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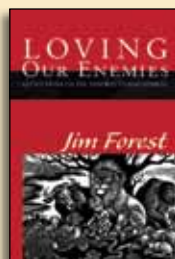
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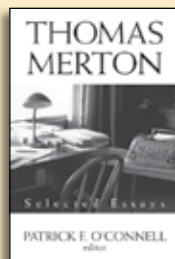
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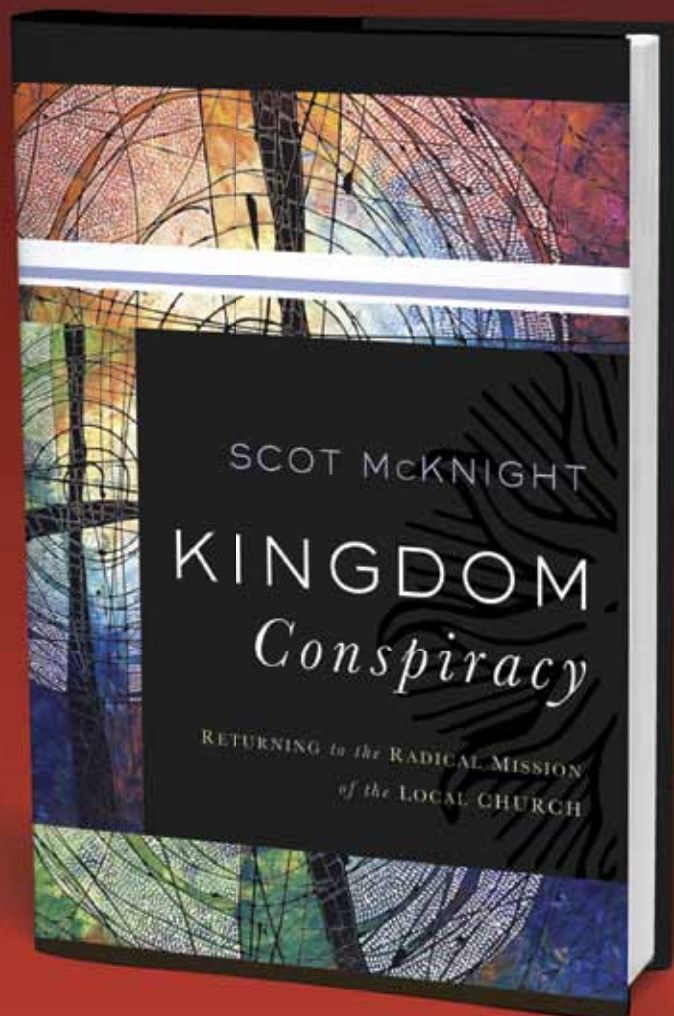
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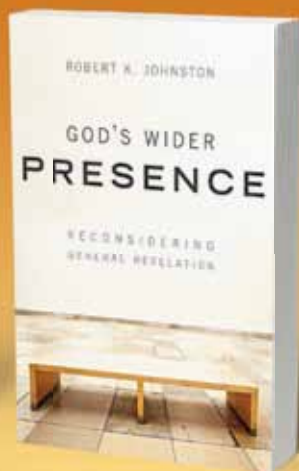


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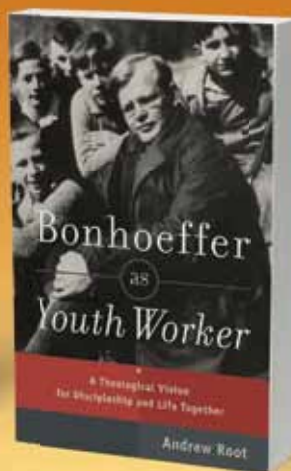
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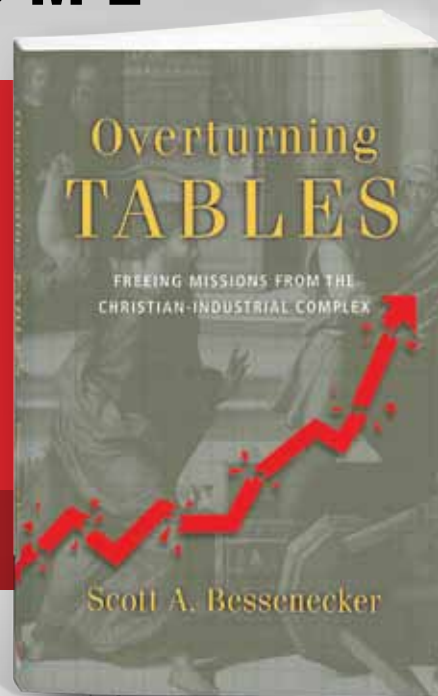
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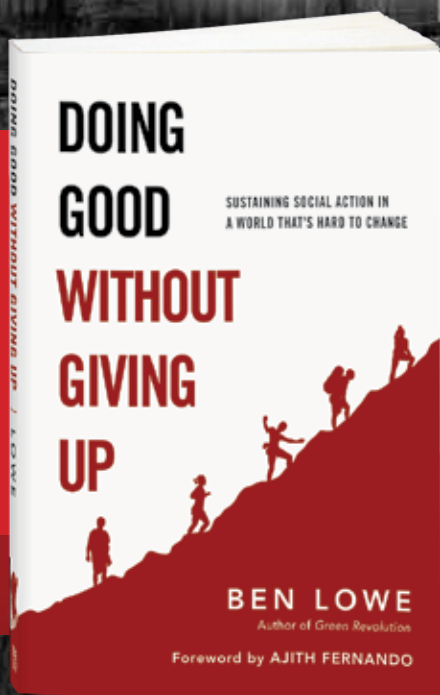
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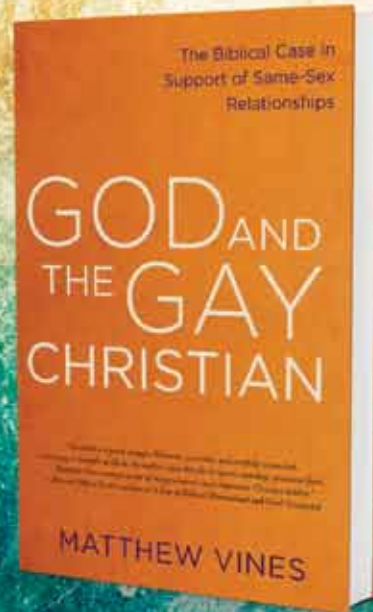
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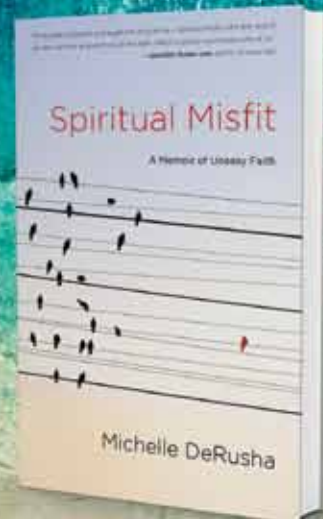
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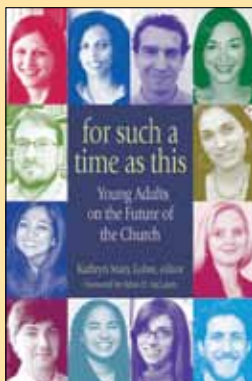
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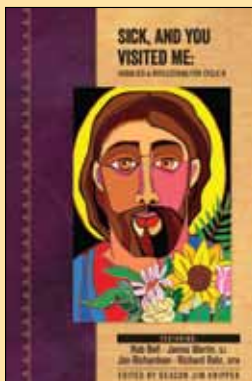
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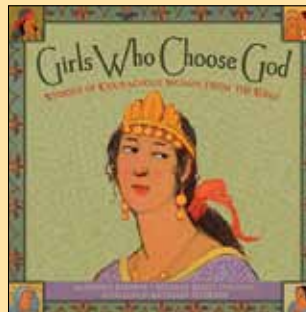


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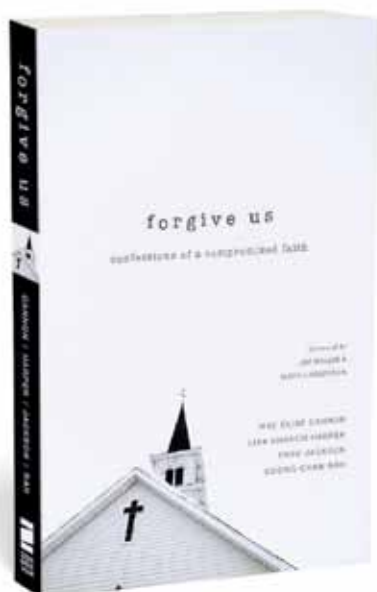
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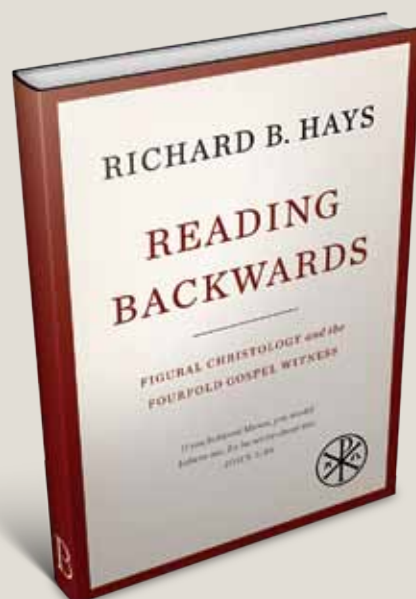
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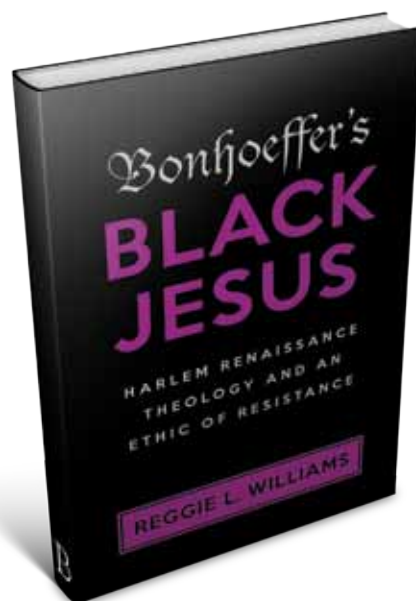


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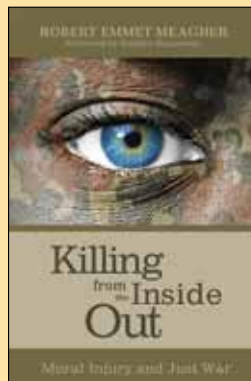
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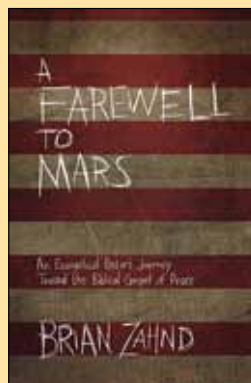
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Kathleen Dean Moore and Michael P. Nelson, editors; Desmond Tutu, foreword

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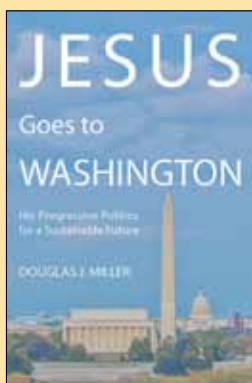
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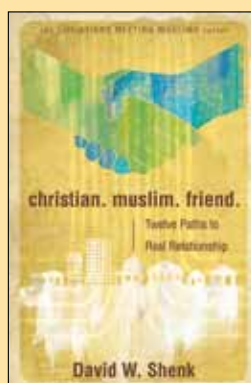
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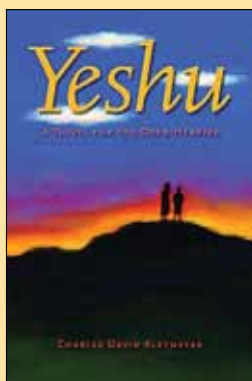


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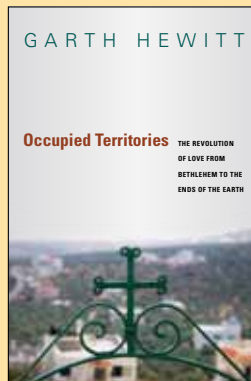
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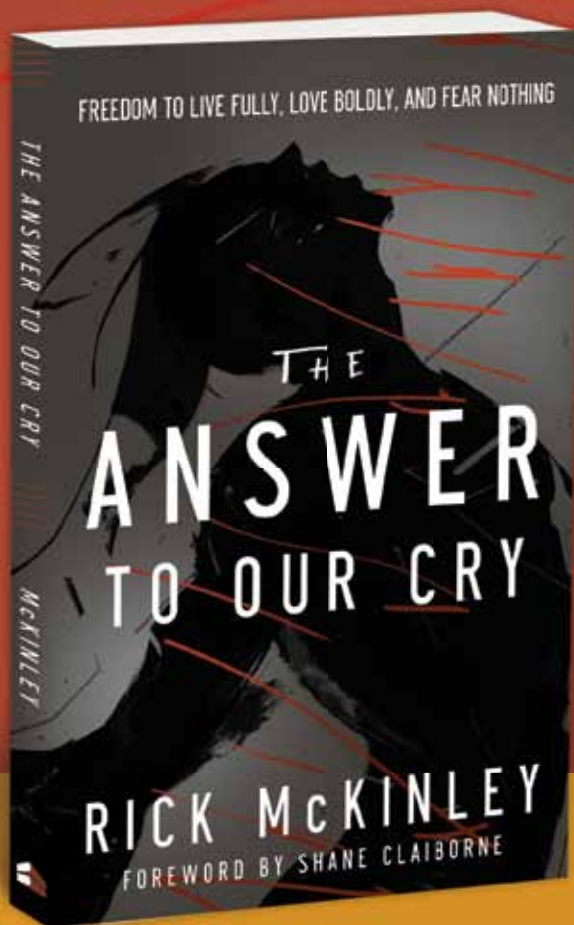
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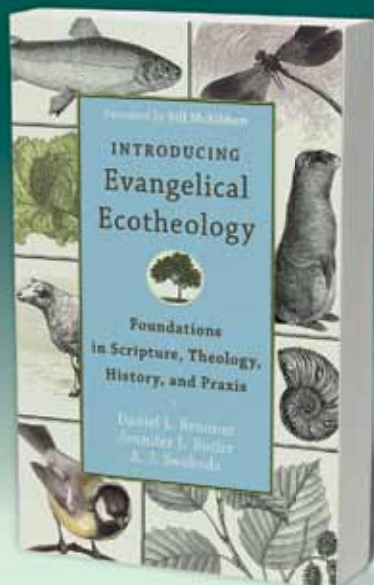


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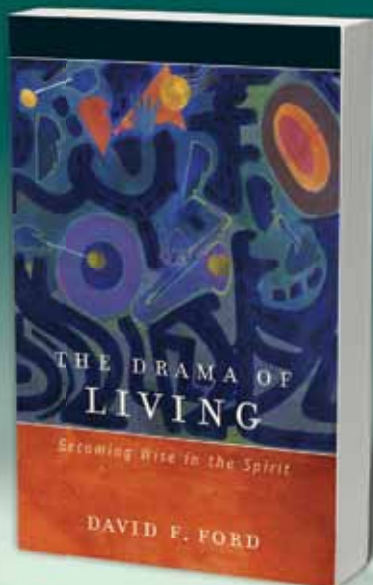


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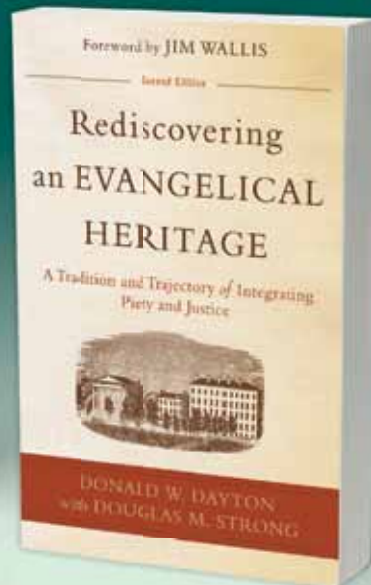
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By Kathryn Reklis

Computing the Future

TV tackles the digital revolution.

"THE COMPUTER'S NOT THE THING. It's the thing that will get us to the thing," intones Joe MacMillan (Lee Pace), the enigmatic visionary at the heart of AMC's new techno-drama *Halt and Catch Fire*. Set in the early 1980s in Texas' "Silicon Prairie," the series chronicles a small, fictional software company that enters the personal computing fray. This is the age of IBM dominance and the improbability of an underdog company taking down the computer Goliath is the premise of the show.

HCF is a kind of origin myth: a drama that tries to capture the spirit and personalities that drove the personal computing revolution that reshaped the world we now inhabit. Across the cable universe, HBO offers another riff on the same theme set in the present day. *Silicon Valley* is a satirical send-up of startup culture and the boy-men who rule the northern California empire to which we are all in thrall. In tone and style it is the antithesis of the self-consciously serious *HCF*. But the two shows share a similar preoccupation with exploring the humans who make technology even more than the technology itself.

This is partially a necessity of good storytelling. Nothing slows down a story like having to explain technical expertise. At best you can get a few gags out of



Mackenzie Davis in the AMC techno-drama *Halt and Catch Fire*.

the science geek spewing unintelligible jargon to the bewildered “everyperson” (think Sheldon’s whole persona on *The Big Bang Theory*). But this narrative limitation also hints at the enigma both shows are trying to explore: Who are the people who understand the jargon and create the technology that defines our new digital age? What is the nature of this kind of power?

One of tech culture’s favorite answers to that question is to insist on the utopian, non-hierarchical nature of digital power. We all know some version of this song. The internet unleashes the core democratic potential in human nature: information flowing free of traditional political or economic constraints—instant access to everything by everyone! And you don’t have to be a tech geek to participate. Anyone can post anything to YouTube! The revolution can be tweeted! Facebook connects the world in solidarity and community!

Inside CultureWatch

42 The Christ of Compton

Danny Duncan Collum
on *Black Jesus*

44 Life after a Death

Julienne Gage reviews
Pilgrimage through Loss

46 Full-Body Repentance

An excerpt from *Forgive Us*

It does, however, take a considerable amount of technical expertise to create the platform that hosts YouTube. Ordinary users have no power over the basic design of a Facebook page, which all look basically the same. More data about our behaviors, preferences, movements, and relationships are being collected—to uncertain ends—than was feasible at any other time in human history. And at least for the time being, only

Who are the people who understand the jargon and create the technology that defines our new digital age?

some people can build and code those computers. It is not surprising, then, that pop culture fictions are turning an eye to the personalities and cultures of the people who are setting the terms of our future.

Those personalities run a rather clichéd spectrum from madman to wunderkind in *Halt and Catch Fire*. There is Joe. Part visionary leader, part sociopath, he manipulates everyone around him into his master plan to build a personal computer to compete with IBM—starting with Gordon Clark (Scoot McNairy), a washed-up computer engineer turned software salesman, and Cameron Howe (Mackenzie Davis), a coding prodigy whose punk-rock attitude and double X chromosomes rub up against the old-boys club.

This triumvirate—narcissistic visionary, experienced engineer, and tech savant—form the backbone of the new “tech culture” that is challenging the 1980s corporate culture. The bad guys are still the men in suits who treat computers like one more commodity in their portfolios. Even the threat from IBM is not superior technology but the number of navy-clad lawyers they can fly in to intimidate the locals. Real power is corporate power, and corporate power looks like a 1980s Wall Street film: power lunches and deals cut in smokey bar rooms, briefcases and pinstriped ties, country clubs and Ivy Leagues.

Continued on Page 43

New & Noteworthy

PATERNAL INSIGHTS

Father Factor: American Christian Men on Fatherhood and Faith offers diverse perspectives from men under 40 who are rooted in a broad spectrum of Christian traditions, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Edited by R. Anderson Campbell, this is the fifth volume in the *I Speak for Myself* series. White Cloud Press



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Kimberly Torrez from *Life on the Line*

IN BETWEEN

The documentary *Life on the Line* follows 11-year-old Kimberly Torrez as her family await the visa that will allow them to return to the U.S. after circumstances trap them in Nogales, Mexico. An accompanying online project shares the stories of other young people affected by immigration issues. finelinefilms.org/lifeontheline

MORE THAN METAPHOR

Drawing on feminist perspectives, biblical scholars delve into the practical and theological dimensions of hunger in *By Bread Alone: The Bible through the Eyes of the Hungry*, edited by Sheila E. McGinn, Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan, and Ahida Calderón Pilarski. Fortress Press

The Christ of Compton

JESUS RETURNED this past August. Or at least a new depiction of him appeared on late-night cable television, in the comedy *Black Jesus*, created by Aaron McGruder (of *The Boondocks*). There was no rapture, and no subsequent tribulation, beyond what passes for normal these days. Instead Jesus appeared, as he did in Palestine, in a manner both obscure and mysterious. And, again, his incarnation became a scandal among some of the powerful and pious.

In *Black Jesus*, on the Adult Swim network, the second person of the Trinity turns up one day on the streets of Compton, a very poor and heavily African-American community in southern Los Angeles County. Played by a tall and beefy Gerald “Slink” Johnson, Jesus walks the streets in his first century robe and sandals, but with his hair in a Tina Turner perm. Aside from the eccentric get-up, this Jesus fits right into his surroundings. He has no cash, and no place to lay his head. But that goes for plenty of



League, which often leads the charge against perceived offenses to the faith, got it about right when it said, “The Jesus character in this show is a mixed bag: He is irreverent and can be downright crude, but he also has many redeeming qualities.”

I caught the first few episodes of *Black Jesus* during those hot August days when Michael Brown, an unarmed young black man, had just been shot like a dog in the streets of Ferguson, Mo. In that context, it didn’t seem strange that Jesus would want to identify with unemployed

young African Americans and offer them his love, solace, and support. They are, after all, perhaps the most disenfranchised, discouraged, and endangered people in the U.S. In McGruder’s show, that’s what Jesus does. A small posse of young people is drawn to him. They include the young son of a major pot dealer, a fellow who’s been in and out of jail, a bespectacled nerd, and a Facebook-obsessed young woman named Maggie (short for Magdalene?).

Yes, McGruder’s Jesus shares in his people’s folkways and small pleasures, but he also challenges their

prejudices, violence, and self-seeking. He promotes “black-Latin” reconciliation and tries to turn his young apostles toward a life of positive community service.

As I watched *Black Jesus*, I kept thinking about the *Cotton Patch New Testament* written by biblical scholar and Koinonia Farm founder Clarence Jordan. He did a faithful translation from the Greek into lively Southern English and set the story in the Deep South of the 1960s. Jerusalem was Atlanta. Gentiles were African Americans, and Jews were “good white folk.” The Acts of the Apostles came out sounding a lot like the early 1960s travails of Southern civil rights workers. In the gospel of John, the Word of God didn’t come to dwell among us; it parked its trailer next to ours.

Aaron McGruder is no Clarence Jordan. And *Black Jesus* is, first and foremost, a comedy. But there are moments in the show when I thought I caught a sideways glimpse of the true Christ. He may never replace that Italian Renaissance Jesus above the altar, but *Black Jesus* is real religious art, nonetheless. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.



Jesus appears on Adult Swim, as he did in Palestine, in a manner both obscure and mysterious.

Comptonites. He enjoys malt liquor and marijuana, just as much as he did good wine back in the day at Cana. He’s still preaching and practicing unconditional love, forgiveness, nonviolence, and service to all, but his street talk averages about 1.5 bleeps per sentence.

There’s plenty that’s problematic about Slink Johnson’s character. For one thing, I can’t imagine the Jesus I know using the disrespectful canine term for women so freely or being quite so nonjudgmental about the marijuana trade. But neither does this depiction approach “blasphemy,” which is what the American Family Association called it. The Catholic

Continued from Page 41

This world feels light years away from the insurrectionary vibe cultivated by Silicon Valley today. Which is to say that Joe might be prophetic when he declares that the computer is the thing to the thing, but even he can't exactly see what "the thing" is.

SILICON VALLEY, on the other hand, confidently lampoons where Joe's hoped-for revolution has headed: "The thing" computers will make possible is an easier life for 24-year-olds with time and money to spare.

The series follows a group of young men living together in Palo Alto hoping to strike it rich in the silicon gold rush. Clearly they are all talented programmers, yet they can't escape the mindset of adolescent boys. One is hard at work creating an app that will locate the nearest pair of female nipples using GPS technology; another is designing a program to help you remember where you parked your car in a crowded garage. Not exactly a technoutopia in the making. Even when the show's protagonist, Richard (Thomas Middleditch), creates a file compression algorithm with implications for military, health care, and governmental uses, he is so wedded to his original music-sharing platform he can't see the digital gold in his hands.

The show skewers this collective waste of time and talent. Surrounded by feel-good mantras ("making the world a better place") and empty slogans ("it takes change to make change"), the programming class is just as enmeshed in corporate groupthink as any 1980s Wall Street broker. Everyone is searching for the ephemeral "next Facebook" that will catapult him to Zuckerberg status. None of them have any idea what to do with a good idea when it strikes or even what might constitute a truly original idea. When asked to present a business plan, Richard has to Google the term and he is incapable of formulating a simple explanation of what the new company he is founding actually does. This does not stop investors from starting a bidding war to buy or fund his ideas.

Like all good satire, *Silicon Valley's* comic genius is in the details. The unrelenting "youthism" of the Valley is parodied with a preteen programmer who is called to save the day when the 20-something Richard hits a wall. There is a very funny scene in which a group of neighborhood fifth graders



From *The Overnighters*

BOOMTOWN STORIES

HIGHBROW FILM criticism and fanboy comment pages alike often manifest as if their purpose is to make snarky points about who knows how much about what. Whether in an academic journal or on Reddit, film criticism can either get the point or be the point. We can either convince ourselves that we exist to show the world how smart we (think we) are—or to facilitate a conversation about the purpose of art that's spacious enough to stimulate both the heart and the mind.

The lack of clarity about such purpose means that it has to be continually reasserted, so here goes: The purpose of art is to help us live better. I contend that this is the primary evaluative lens through which we should watch. Of course aesthetics, craft, and content matter, but how I watch films depends at least as much on the notion that art emerges from a human creative impulse that is at its best directed at the common good.

The protagonist of the new documentary *The Overnighters* has made a similar shift in consciousness regarding his own vocation. North Dakota pastor Jay Reinke understands that the purpose of church isn't far different from that of art, and he opens his building to economically disenfranchised folk trying to find a job in the oil boom, letting them stay overnight despite local suspicions. It's a manifestation of Christian vocation mingled with lightly ringing alarm bells—the pastor

appears to be a Lone Ranger, not collaborating with supportive church leaders or members; the jobs are in an environmentally degrading industry—and a picture of community service that seems at once miraculous and exhausting.

Pastor Reinke is a theologically conservative figure with a heart of gold and an inner life subject to the repression of the very tradition whose ministry credentials he stewards. Once revealed, it's not hard to imagine why he feels so much compassion for people who find themselves otherwise marginalized.

Director Jesse Moss has fashioned a compelling, moving, and surprising film; it takes Middle America more seriously than most, thoughtfully fleshing out a complex human story that might otherwise be reduced to statistics about industrial job layoffs. I do fear that its engagement with the pastor's personal struggle is both underdone and played for spectacle. *The Overnighters* does, however, resonate with the highest purpose of faith communities and art alike: It wants to tell the truth about life, not merely to lament difficult circumstances, but in the hope that the telling of the story might help people transcend them. ■

Gareth Higgins is a northern Irish writer living in North Carolina. He co-presents thefilmtalk.com and soulelegram.com.

are hit up for their Adderall prescriptions. The glaring absence of women from most tech culture and the social immaturity of the young male programmers is spoofed at least once per episode. And the show does a superlative job nailing the self-congratulatory culture of the corporate heads who really seem to believe they are “sticking it to the man” with their on-call spiritual gurus and voluntary mindfulness retreats.

The real bite of the show, however, is the implicit question behind the satire: What happens to the revolutionary rhetoric when the Valley is “the man”? Nap rooms, espresso bars, and a relaxed dress code, after all, don’t make tech firms less of corporations than their buttoned-up predecessors. Richard and his friends learn this the hard way when Hooli (a fictional Google stand-in) uses its extensive corporate muscle to steal Richard’s idea and market it as their own. The costumes have changed from pinstripes to flip-flops, but the power play is all too familiar.

If *Halt and Catch Fire* is still enamored with the possibility of a technological insurrection—freeing the world one personal computer at a time—*Silicon Valley* reminds us that we can no longer afford to think uncritically of tech as an insurrectionary outsider. The emperor might be a 24-year-old at a toga party, but with billions of dollars at stake, he is still the emperor.

This does not mean that there are no disruptive or insurrectionary possibilities left for the digital age. Digital networks do have the capacity to create nonhierarchical, interconnected communities, and there is genuine democratic potential in more open information flows. But as both Joe and Richard learn all too quickly, the drive to centralize, control, and monetize these liberating technologies is often more powerful than the impulse to freedom.

Of course, origin myths and satires won’t start a new tech revolution. But they might help us understand how and why the revolution fails as we try to imagine other possibilities. ■

Kathryn Reklis is assistant professor of modern Protestant theology at Fordham University and co-director of the Institute for Art, Religion, and Social Justice at Union Theological Seminary, which she founded with artist AA Bronson in 2009.

Reviewed by Julianne Gage

LIFE AFTER A DEATH

Pilgrimage through Loss: Pathways to Strength and Renewal after the Death of a Child, by Linda Lawrence Hunt. Westminster John Knox Press.

IN 1998, AWARD-WINNING writer Linda Lawrence Hunt and her husband, Jim, were forced to consider a question no parent wants to ask: How do you find meaning in life after losing your child?

Their 25-year-old daughter, Krista Hunt Ausland, had just died in a bus accident in Bolivia while volunteering with the Mennonite Central Committee.

“Your joys become more intense,” consoled a friend whose family had also lost a child.

This resonated with Linda, especially since Krista was known for her energy and enthusiasm. Linda and her husband, now retired professors of English and history at Whitworth University, had always encouraged Krista to travel and take part in community service, but even they were amazed by the intense joy Krista exuded serving as a school teacher in inner-city Tacoma, Wash., or volunteering in poor communities in Latin America. Writing about that joy might help to recover some of it in Linda’s own life, she thought.

Fifteen years later, Linda’s newest book is more than just an ode to a remarkably happy daughter. *Pilgrimage through Loss: Pathways to Strength and Renewal after the Death of a Child* is a collection of ideas and insight from more than 30 parents who decide in their darkest hours to “face grief in creative and intentional ways.” The book, which contains study questions at the end of each chapter and references new research on grief, is intended as a resource for grieving parents, as well as for those hoping to support them in the right ways and at the right times.

“Closure is an illusion,” explains Linda, but she describes multiple examples of parents finding strength and even joy in sacred spaces and rituals, as well as in giving and receiving symbolic acts of kindness.

These insights help friends of grieving parents consider what responses would be most appreciated. Some might come as a



surprise. For example, many parents told Linda they long to hear others say their child’s name, but find people often shy away from doing so in their presence out of fear that it would be uncomfortable. Parents also speak of gratitude for receiving letters their child once sent someone else and

of the warmth they feel when they are able to pass along mementos of their lost child to others at just the right moment.

Linda learned early in the grief cycle that taking small steps like visiting art fairs or cooking helped to ease the “acute pain” for her. Deciding when to push oneself to be open to the support of others and when to seek solitude are also crucial ways of seizing moments.

Prayer, meditation, and a willingness to honor their own instincts helped Jim and Linda make several bold moves. A few months after Krista’s death, they accompanied Krista’s husband, Aaron Ausland, back to the crash site in Bolivia and spent time hearing of the couple’s adventures. Jim also returned to Central America, where he once took Krista during a college study tour. Visits to churches impacted by the war in El Salvador gave him a vision for sharing Krista’s passion for social justice, and in 1999 Jim and Linda formed the Krista Foundation for Global Citizenship to mentor other Christian volunteers through international and domestic social outreach.

In the period right after a loss, it’s hard to imagine feeling creative or joyful about anything, which is why this book offers gentle questions and encouragement. These stories and insights from parents who outlived a child testify that while grief persists, so also does love, and from that, hope and joy may be reborn. ■

Julianne Gage, a journalist based in Washington, D.C., was a close childhood friend of Krista Hunt Ausland, and she studied under Ausland’s parents at Whitworth University.



Jon Favreau, right,
and Emjay Anthony
in *Chef*, the film.

Reviewed by José Humphreys

COOKING UP **MEANING**

Chef, written and directed by Jon Favreau.

CHEF IS A small-budget film with an all-star cast and artful storytelling. Jon Favreau, who also directed *Iron Man*, stars in his own film as a head chef named Carl Casper at an acclaimed restaurant in Los Angeles. Casper is left in a vocational tailspin after a scathing review and a public meltdown. He loses his inspiration and finds himself in an existential crisis.

In *Chef* Casper's quest to recover his culinary mojo, he takes a trip to Miami and buys a used food truck. The film plays on the power of relationships in a messy, winding, but authentic path. Chef Casper's community—his ex-wife, his son, and his best friend—are invited into the one thing Casper loves to do, demonstrating how community, at its best, can propel us on the way we should go.

Each truck stop on the journey back to California fills Chef Casper with new vision and adds distinctive ingredients. He makes his way to once again bring beauty and flourishing back to his street corner of the world.

My small group at church watched *Chef* together and bonded over it. We explored themes of vocation—how we can contribute to flourishing through the distinctive things “we’re good at.” And how activism isn’t just about waving the proverbial picket sign; it also can be about loving what we do with great friends.

Highlighting these conversations and convergences



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CultureWatch

BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

Excerpt

FULL-BODY REPENTANCE

THE CRY OF the church to the world should be "Forgive us."

At a time when the American church struggles with finding its place in the world and struggles with asserting its identity, could the church be known as the community that models confession, repentance, and the seeking of forgiveness? At this moment in history, the American church is often ridiculed or portrayed as unforgiving and ungracious. Could the church offer a counter-narrative, not of defensiveness or derision but of an authentic confession and genuine reconciliation? By examining seven different areas where the church has committed sin, we ask the church to consider the spiritual power and the theological integrity of a church that seeks forgiveness for those sins.

Our scriptures testify to the necessity of confession. Confession is central to the Christian faith. The importance of confession arises from the Christian view of sin. Sin is a reality and must be taken seriously. Evangelicals consistently begin our gospel presentation with the centrality of sin to the human experience. American evangelicals often assert that the beginning of the work of God's forgiveness is the recognition of our need for God because of human sinfulness.

It is antithetical to the gospel when we do not confess all forms of sin—both individual and corporate. The reason evangelicals can claim to be followers of Jesus is because there has been an acknowledgement of sin and the seeking of God's grace through Jesus Christ that leads to the forgiveness of sin.

But in our corporate life, we spend a significant amount of time trying to deny our sin. We spend much of our time addressing the sins of others, while minimizing our own. We are willing to embrace the grace of God, but we do not often acknowledge the holiness of God, because we fail to confess how far we as a church have fallen short and continue to fall short of the glory of God. Our captivity to the hyper-individualism of Western culture may lead us to acknowledge that individual Christians have acted in an unworthy manner, but it often does not lead us to recognize our own complicity in corporate sinfulness and culpability.

It would be easy to blame the racists and sexists in the Christian community and distance ourselves from them. But we must begin to see the corporate responsibility that the church holds in our presentation to the world. How do we contribute and perpetuate the public wrongdoing of Christians through our silence and passivity? We acknowledge the many places in our nation's history, as well as in contemporary Christianity, that have presented a sinful face to the world. In recognizing past and current sins, we, as people who uphold the tenets of scripture, have no choice but to offer up confession on behalf of the church. ■

*Taken from **Forgive Us**, by Mae Elise Cannon, Lisa Sharon Harper, Troy Jackson, and Soong-Chan Rah. Copyright © 2014. Used by permission of Zondervan. www.Zondervan.com*



with Hollywood and life are vital for my own work. The congregation I serve in East Harlem consists mainly of nonprofit professionals, educators, and human service workers—convincing these folks about shalom and justice is not usually a challenge. What they hunger for is guidance in cultivating meaning through the crises and mundaneness of life and work.

People will often ask things like, “What difference do my actions make in the world?” My response: It all can work toward flourishing.

My words are not an attempt to soothe away the question or cook up synthetic inspiration. I truly believe that small actions in the world can make a huge difference—particularly if we live our lives day-to-day, meaningfully, honoring each 24-hour square in our planner.

Rather than seeing our work as just a drop in a large ocean, perhaps we can think of the butterfly effect, in which, as the Oxford Dictionary describes it, “a minute localized change in a complex system can have large effects elsewhere.”

Chef reminds us that even in preparing a simple meal we create spaces for people to connect and make

Activism isn't just about waving the proverbial picket sign; it also can be about loving what we do with great friends.

memories. We can learn about the farm-to-table journey. We can generate great joy in serving meals to our loved ones. As Michael Pollan writes in *Cooked*, “is there any practice less selfish, any labor less alienated, any time less wasted, than preparing something delicious and nourishing for people you love?” Even food, an impermanent thing, can leave an imprint on people's hearts and memories, and bring nutrients to billions of cells and the vital organs in our body.

This is the kind of rant quality films like *Chef* can inspire if we become present to the convergences of faith and an engaged life in our culture! Or, at the least, *Chef* will be a great time for movie night with activist friends, who might want to revisit their own work and creativity in the pursuit of human flourishing.

As Chef Casper says in the film, “I may not do everything great in my life, but I'm good at this. I manage to touch people's lives with what I do, and I want to share this with you.” ■

José Humphreys is pastor of Metro Hope Church in New York City and a member of the Latino Leadership Circle. Chef was released on DVD on Sept. 30.

Poetry

BY NAOMI SHIHAB NYE



Palestinians stand on a Gaza beach at sunset.

Everything Changes the World

Boys on a beach,
women with cookpots,
men bombing tender patches of mint.

There is no righteous position.
Only a place where brown feet
touch the earth.

Maybe you call it yours.
Maybe someone else runs it.
What do you prefer?

We who are far
stagger under the mind blade.
Words, lies.
My friend in Bethlehem says,
Pious myth-building and criminal behavior,
that's what.

Every shattered home,
every shattered story worth telling.
Think how much you'd need to say
if that were your kid.

If one of your people
equals hundreds of ours,
what does that say about people?

Naomi Shihab Nye, born to a Palestinian father and American mother, is a poet, novelist, and anthologist of more than 30 volumes. Her newest book is The Turtle of Oman.

The Lives of Others

WE LIVE IN A TIME of widespread violence. No country, no community, no person is untouched by violence. It is a complex problem stemming from our thought patterns and actions that are, in turn, shaped by various forces in our daily lives. Because violence is so complex, we often seek an easy answer—typically, naming a specific religion, culture, ethnicity, or nationality as a cause of the evil that perpetrates or stimulates violence.

But we all know that such scapegoating is another crime that only creates more violence. Each and every individual and community has good and bad, strength and weakness, merit and demerit. Just as no one is perfectly good, no one is perfectly evil. In her well-known book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, philosopher and writer Hannah Arendt points out that evil is related to the lack of reflective thinking. “The longer one listened to [Eichmann],” writes Arendt, “the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of someone else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and presence of others, and hence against reality as such.”



For Arendt, to think reflectively means to be aware and to take into account the reality that one’s own life is always in relation to the lives of others. This is also what the biblical texts this month invite us to contemplate.

Min-Ah Cho is assistant professor of theology and spirituality at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minn.

[NOVEMBER 2]

When Injustice is ‘Normal’

Micah 3:5-12; Psalm 43; 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13; Matthew 23:1-12

IN THE THIRD chapter of Micah, the prophet criticizes the false prophets (verses 5-8), then extends his criticism to those who are involved in governance, including rulers and priests who have exploited the innocent. God’s burning wrath and punitive destruction are reserved for those leaders who fail to care adequately for God’s people. Micah particularly admonishes the fact that their ugly, unjust, and degrading acts have become normal and accepted as the way things are done (verse 11).

In Matthew 23:1-12, Jesus also confronts some unjust leaders. Here, Jesus’ opponents are not the temple officials, but the Pharisees who work for them. Let’s be careful here with the temptation to an anti-Jewish reading of chapter 23. All the main characters of Matthew—including Jesus—were Jews. Matthew is critical of the Pharisees not because they were Jews, but

because this particular group was neglecting the true values of the law—love, mercy, and justice. Jesus criticized their motives, saying that they taught Torah in a way to gain human favor and honor. While these religious leaders didn’t directly tell people that the Torah permits immoral activities, they were putting heavy burdens of religious approbation on those they taught (23:4).

In Matthew’s context, Jesus accuses the religious leaders of making a defense similar to what we hear from public leaders today, including some of our own religious leaders. While they do not directly oppress the poor and weak, they justify and normalize unjust practices that place heavy burdens on them, rather than trying to mitigate the burdens on people marginalized by society. They subtly use their expertise to secure their own privilege.

“Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

[NOVEMBER 9]

How Shall We Wait?

Amos 5:18-24; Psalm 70;
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

THE PARABLE OF the “10 virgins” in Matthew 25:1-13 is fairly transparent. The coming of the Human One is certain, but the time of arrival is not. The disciples must dutifully and expectantly prepare for a delay in the Human One’s return, just like those “wise virgins” who had sufficient oil in case of a delay in the bridegroom’s return.

For disciples today, what should we do as we wait? Lutheran biblical scholar Karl P. Donfried suggests a thematic link between this parable and Jesus’ aphorisms about “lighting a lamp” and letting it shine before others (Matthew 5:14-16), defining the light as “good works” (verse 16). Thus, Jesus’ plea for the constant vigil is also a call to good works. Not everyone who says to him “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of God, but only the one who does the will of God in heaven (7:21).

The prophet Amos describes the nature of good works. God is disgusted with worship that ignores the impoverished. Greed, idleness, a false sense of security, and a reliance on appeasing God with offerings are the forces that prevent us from caring for our neighbors and from doing good works. Only a constant search for justice and righteousness will enable us properly to discern God’s will, remain in relation with others, and do good works.

[NOVEMBER 16]

Letting Go of Self-Sufficiency

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18; Psalm 90:1-12;
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

ALONG WITH LUKE’S parable of the rich young man (19:11-17), Matthew’s “parable of the talents” is one of the most difficult passages for many Christians because it appears different from the rest of Jesus’ teaching in which he criticizes the rich and privileged. This parable, instead, seems to justify a capitalistic mentality and to encourage one to

use her “talent” as a type of a self-development program.

However, if we read the text in relation to the overall theme of Matthew’s gospel, the parable shows us something consistent with the rest of Jesus’ teaching. What the third servant lacks is reflective thinking. He didn’t make an effort for joyful kingdom participation, because he didn’t trust the master as much as his own ability to be part of the master’s plan. Instead, he locked himself into a closet of mistrust and doubt, while complaining and grinding his teeth.

Zephaniah describes something similar. The prophet warns against complacency and indifference, both of which prevent one from being open and vulnerable. The day of the Lord is at hand. It is for the poor in spirit, the humble, and the meek—those who willingly submit their self-sufficiency and self-interest to God. God expects us to delightfully join the kingdom by using the gifts God gave us. Yet, the greatest gift we receive from God—and may also return to the kingdom—is our self.

[NOVEMBER 23]

Justice Nurtures Healing

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 95:1-7a;
Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

WHEN ISRAEL’S LEADERS turn away from the people, God steps in on the people’s behalf to feed them. For Ezekiel, justice means that God holds the oppressors accountable for persecuting their people. At the same time, God’s justice enables the oppressed to recover their basic needs as well as dignity and freedom. Justice and healing never stay separated.

The parable of the goats and sheep (Matthew 25: 31-46) is about practicing justice as we live in the not-yet-fully present kingdom of God. Jesus’ command is straightforward. Note how he identifies himself with “the least of these.” The acts of either kindness or neglect toward the “least of these” are acts directed at God. In other words, solidarity with the poor and disenfranchised is commensurate with solidarity with God. The more we open ourselves up

to the disenfranchised, the more we experience communion with God.

The Matthean text highlights that, for Jesus, justice flows out of the irresistible compassion through which he feels our pain as if it were his own. Without a keen awareness of the interdependence of all the living beings, justice can easily turn into vengeance. Only when we remember that we are all part of one another will justice nurture healing.

[NOVEMBER 30]

Advent of a New Era

Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19;
1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

IN ISAIAH 64:1-9, the pain people bear, brought on by injustice, is obvious. The prophet appeals for divine intervention to heal the damage of their sin. However, God’s response is unclear. God *hid* because the people transgressed.

Fear and uncertainty continue in the Markan text. Jesus teaches his disciples about the great and terrible coming of the Human One whose time of arrival is uncertain. What should the disciples do in order to prepare for the end of the age? In the previous text (Mark 13:1-8), Jesus dismisses the desire to cling to the temple. He makes it clear that God is not in a temple made by humans. The desolating downfall of the temple, rather, will signal the end of the era, says Jesus. God will not be in the place where we look, where we worship, where we try to grasp. Instead, Jesus repeatedly says “Be alert” (13:23), “keep awake” (13:37), wait for God’s time in the uncertainty.

As we enter the season of Advent, we may want to ponder this uncertainty. The uncertainty of God’s time points to the reality of the incarnation as well. While the incarnation is a concrete event through which God’s self-communication with humanity enters history, it is also an event in which we anticipate and experience uncertainty and confusion. In the event of the incarnation, life and death, joy and sorrow, heaven and earth are inseparable. We ought to remember, however, that God did not come into an empty matrix, but into the web of relations in which human lives always search for love, belonging, and meaning out of confusion, turmoil, and uncertainty. ■



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The Year in Review. (Too soon?)

IT'S A LITTLE early to be looking back at the past year, but I have to say I'm very disappointed in 2014. It was supposed to be the Year of the Cicada, a time when millions of fat little bugs would emerge from the ground and loudly buzz around the nation's capital, possibly joining the chorus to impeach the president. (The cries for impeachment *had* developed a definite bug-like drone.)

Every 17 years or so, the cicadas are supposed to emerge from the

and flying forth into the glorious light of day, we got *nada*.

No sitting on the front porch watching cicadas celebrating their new world or becoming lunch to passing birds, whichever comes first; no entomological moment of awe; no opportunity to provide learned commentary on nature's brutal cycle of life to a wide-eyed grandchild. ("So that's why you should stay in school and not take drugs.")

Some town across the river got a few hundred of the bugs, but in my block in Washington, D.C., we found only one, lying on its back in a flower bed, and—like a dead corn flake—not moving.

Despite the limited utility a dead bug offers for important life lessons, our 3-year-old tried her best to gain something from the experience. She picked up the carcass and gently placed it inside an upturned plastic sand mold, where it lay in state for a week, even traveling with us by car for a few days at the beach. It was a somber funeral procession, punctuated by occasional bathroom stops.

Of course, in the give-and-take of summer travel, a makeshift sarcophagus will overturn frequently, and we almost lost it at various beach town sites. Mr. Whippy's Ice Cream Parlor would have been its final resting place had the granddaughter not spotted it under the tire of our parked car. Setting down

her cold treat and invoking the quiet reverence the occasion required, she carefully placed its body back in its little coffin. She then returned to her ice cream. (One can grieve only so much in a beach town.)

Sadly, as could have been expected, its body was eventually lost to us, possibly at another ice cream place. (He would have wanted it that way.)

SCIENTISTS ARE still puzzled why the cicadas remained underground, although it's an election year, which may have something to do with it. A few million new arrivals without IDs would not be allowed to participate in the democratic process, so why bother to even show up?

Or maybe they just didn't want to get hit with a bucket of ice water, an odd practice that's trending this year. (Humans are a little weird compared to cicadas. And not just because we live much longer than is useful to nature.)

Wait, I think I see a cicada peeking from the ground over there. He's struggling out of the dirt, trying to pull his whole body above the surface. Come on, little guy, you can do it! (*Breaking news: Mitt Romney says he's open to running again in 2016.*) Now, back to that cicada.

Where'd he go? ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Where were the bugs? We were supposed to get lots of bugs.

ground where they have been gestating and, for the first week of their debut, bring a welcome distraction to life's problems. By week two, however, they've *become* life's problems, striking your head and other body parts as you walk outside, or even inside if you leave the screen door open too long for a cat who just ... can't ... decide.

Fortunately, they all die after a couple weeks, but then venturing out into your backyard sounds like walking on corn flakes, if corn flakes were green and disgusting, and dead.

But none of that happened this year. Instead of the fun and natural wonder of watching bugs freeing themselves from their dark captivity



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